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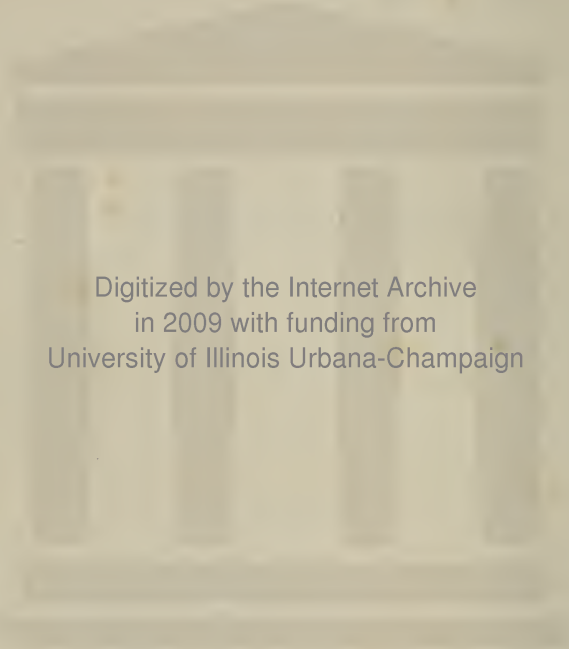
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THE OCCUPATIONS
OF
A RETIRED LIFE.

VOL. III.



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THE OCCUPATIONS

OF

A RETIRED LIFE.

A Novel.

BY EDWARD GARRETT.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE STREET, STRAND.

1868.

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THE OCCUPATIONS
OF
A RETIRED LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

EWEN'S HOLIDAYS.

It proved that Ewen's holidays were not only later, but also shorter, than he had expected. The exigencies of business would only allow him a few days. So one fine autumn morning shortly after our meeting with Mr. Weston, Alice came very early to our house to say that he had arrived at the Refuge late the night before. I thought her visit rather odd, as her brother would be sure to announce himself a few hours later. It was the first time we had seen her since

Mr. Weston's tidings, and despite her joy at Ewen's visit, she looked rather pale and grave, and so recalled all my first impressions of her. When she prepared to go away, Ruth followed her from the room, and presently I heard them in the next apartment, speaking in earnest whispers. At last the hall-door closed, I saw Alice go down the garden path, and then my sister re-appeared.

"Can you guess why she came?" she inquired.

"No," I answered, "but I can guess she did not come without an object."

"She came to ask us not to name Mr. Weston to Ewen," replied my sister, in that whisper which comes so naturally when any secrecy is enjoined.

"I can understand all her reasons," I said. "It is a beautiful piece of unselfishness. But I wish she had forgotten to enjoin our silence, for then I should have

spoken. Now we must decidedly yield to her wishes."

"And the poor girl is fretting dreadfully about the change in her brother," Ruth went on. "It makes me quite anxious to see him."

"Oh, Alice forgets that he has been living a sedentary town life," I replied; "and besides, Ewen's is not the style of face which ever displays robust health, once the first bloom of boyhood is past."

So all the morning I sat at home waiting for him. But he did not come. When dinner time came and passed, without his appearance, I grew a little vexed. And when Ruth broadly took his part, and invented such good reasons for his non-arrival, I grew vexed with her also.

"You would not like it if I fidgeted you because Agnes Herbert neglects me," said Ruth, pointedly. "And she has never been here to tea since the night when Alice showed us those pictures."

I had no answer to make, but after dinner I went out, saying to myself that if everybody had forgotten the old man, he would at least take care of himself, and get a little fresh air. That is not often my train of thought, and I am very glad of it, for I found it was not at all conducive to happiness, and I went along grumbling to myself at a fine rate. I took my usual route through the meadows flanking the road to the village. Between their bordering of trees, now lightened of half their wealth of leaves, I caught glimpses of the Great Farm. But in the field immediately facing the house (it was the one behind the Low Meadow), I almost started to see him whose apparent negligence had thus put me out of temper. He stood, leaning against a tree upon a slight elevation. His arms were folded, and he was so wrapt in gloomy reverie, that he did not observe my approach. When he did so, he

started, and then stepped forward to meet me. All my pique vanished when I saw his face. If it struck me as sharpened and wan when I saw him in his twilight garret, after a day spent in crowds of faded London faces, it now seemed tenfold so, as I saw it under the trees, facing the glowing sunset. Nay, more, he wore a look of acute pain, no mere fleeting expression, but one which had lasted long enough to fix a hard line about his mouth, which was not even broken by his smile. His face recalled the face of a companion of my early manhood, who underwent a severe surgical operation. The sufferer endured without groan or sigh, but his countenance bore the stamp of that anguish till the day he died, years afterwards.

“Alice has told me about the knife which George Wilmot found in this field,” he remarked presently.

I glanced at him, thinking that perhaps the revival of painful associations had some-

thing to do with the look he wore, but, on the contrary, his face seemed to clear as he went on.

“I am very glad of its discovery.”

“Why so, in particular?” I asked, quietly.

“Every little detail throws light on the story,” he answered, rather dreamily.

“*This* does not enlighten me at all,” I said.

“No,” he replied, “but any item may tend to disprove or to prove anything that is said.”

“*What* is said?” I inquired, testily.

“Oh nothing,” he answered, in some confusion.

His manner perplexed me. If he had spoken with such embarrassment during our first interview on the hill overlooking the river, I should have doubted his innocence. Even now, my confidence shook just a little, and we walked side by side in silence.

“That is the door of the Great Farm,” he said, suddenly turning in its direction as a slight sound met my ear, so trifling and distant that I scarcely noticed it.

“You seem to know it well,” I observed.

“You remember I once worked round the house, sir,” he replied, with almost a dash of haughtiness in his manner. “I think Miss Herbert and her dog Griff are coming this way, sir.”

So we stood still and waited for them. The great, substantial grey dog, her constant attendant, came bounding towards us, but instead of paying his usual compliments to me, he leaped upon Ewen, and overwhelmed him with the most demonstrative professions of regard.

His mistress came up almost breathless. “Oh, it is you,” she said when she saw Ewen, and there was a disappointed sound in her voice which was not at all compli-

mentary to the young man. "Griff seems to recognise you," she added, more graciously.

"He recognises something," he replied, caressing the dog. "Griff, Griff, poor, faithful old fellow!"

"And how are you going on in London, my boy?" I asked presently; "as well as before, I hope."

"Oh, yes, sir," he answered. "I wrote you that my salary was raised at Midsummer."

"Yes," I returned, "and I knew it beforehand. But what are you doing as an artist?"

Ewen was on my right hand, and Miss Herbert on my left. She bent a little forward as I asked this question, and he rather drew back, and replied very precisely—

"I succeed better than I hoped. I have illustrated one or two poems in some journals."

"I hope they pay you well," I said.

“I am satisfied, sir,” he answered, with a slight smile.

“Beginners often fare badly,” I said, shaking my wise head; “however well they work, they are generally paid only as beginners.”

“Then there’s something to look forward to,” replied the young man, with one of those quick turns by which he sometimes reminded me of my sister.

“Oh, I find people very kind,” he went on; “and they are more ready to notice things than one would believe. A gentleman whose poem I illustrated, asked about me, and invited me to his house, and then he called on me and looked over all my drawings, and then he asked us to a little party of young artists and authors. He is a well-born, wealthy gentleman, who can afford to show these kindnesses.”

Agnes listened with intense interest.

“Does Mr. Ralph illustrate, too?” I asked.

“Yes, and he does it beautifully,” Ewen answered.

“Yet the gentleman did not notice his work,” I said, silyly, “and so Mr. Ralph had to wait for his invitation till he made his personal acquaintance.”

I wanted to put the young man on his mettle in defence of his friend, and I did not fail.

“His oversight was only an accident,” he answered, eagerly.

“Did he see Mr. Ralph’s drawings when he visited you?” I inquired.

“Mr. Ralph did not offer to show them,” said Ewen.

“Very well, my boy,” I returned; “but whether it was his own fault or not, your invitation was earned and his was only honorary.”

“The gentleman could see Mr. Ralph was his equal,” returned Ewen, with his strange new dignity of manner. “His pre-

sence at his house would not need the explanation that he had drawn this, or written that."

"And how is Mr. Ralph?" I inquired presently.

"He is much better, sir, and he sent his most dutiful regards to you," he replied, returning to his old simple manner.

"I'm afraid Miss Herbert thinks us rather rude," I said; "our conversation must be a riddle to her. Let me explain, my dear, that Mr. Ralph is a young artist who lives with our friend here, and who seems to have seen a great deal of trouble."

"Indeed!" said Agnes. "Griff, Griff, come away, sir. You are quite troublesome to Mr. M'Callum. Really, sir," she added, bending forward and addressing Ewen, "he seems as if he thought you had seen some friend of his, and so leaped up to whisper inquiries in your ear. See, up he goes again! Griff, Griff, come away!"

Her words were simple and natural enough, though she seldom said as much to a comparative stranger; but she spoke with a singular formality and emphasis, and presently as if she thought she had not shown sufficient interest in my explanation, she remarked—

“ ‘Ralph’ sounds odd for a surname. It is much more natural as a Christian one.”

“ Yes, certainly it is,” replied Ewen, with a warmth of assent quite beyond the subject.

“ And how do you like London?” she asked in a few minutes, and without waiting for a reply, added another question. “ Have you ever met any one you knew before?”

I answered for him. “ I know he has met one, for he had some old acquaintance with this very Mr. Ralph.”

“ Yes, I knew Ralph before,” he assented, for the first time naming his friend without the prefix “ Mr.”

“Ralph thinks of going abroad next spring,” he stated presently.

“Going abroad!” exclaimed Agnes, so sharply that I started.

“Does he think he will find more scope in a new country?” I inquired.

Ewen shook his head. “I fear he will go only because he is weary of the old country,” he replied. “Poor fellow, I own he acted foolishly in some things, but he has been punished as if folly were a sin, and the shadow of all he has lost hangs constantly over him. He fancies he will escape it. I think it will go with him. But, as he says, at any rate Australia or Canada will be as home-like as England is now, and there is not one who will suffer by his departure.”

“But suppose he is mistaken in all this!” exclaimed Agnes, in a voice full of tears. Poor girl, I knew her sympathetic and emotional nature!

“I tell him he is mistaken,” said Ewen,

with earnest solemnity, "but I only wish I could prove it to him."

And then we wandered on in silence, till I broke the spell by claiming Ewen's company for my sister's tea-table, and informing Miss Herbert that Ruth made certain comments about her long absence from our house. Agnes replied that she should come to see us in a day or two, and she would come oftener only she feared to be troublesome. She made this answer with a bright, eager look on her sweet face, and then she turned to Ewen, and said in that pretty petitioning tone which women use when they have some dear little trifling request to make—

"Mr. M'Callum, I have long wished to write to a dear friend in London, but I do not know the exact address. If I direct it as well as I can, and send it to the Refuge under cover to you, will you, if possible, supply the omissions of my superscription? I think you will be able."

“Certainly I will do what I can,” he answered, as if he sincerely felt the commonplace commission to be an honour and a pleasure. Then they shook hands,—a regular hearty, honest shake. And she turned away, calling the reluctant Griff to follow her.

It was nearly tea-time when Ruth welcomed our young guest. We partook of the meal in the twilight, for it was a very fine evening, without that autumnal murk and chill which makes artificial light and artificial heat alike grateful. The young man seemed to have recovered his spirits, and consequently his face had lost that haggard hunger which had so startled me at our first meeting. Nevertheless, when the lamp was at last brought in, and Ruth took up her knitting, I saw she stole many a glance at him, as we sat conversing about his promotions, and the cheerful prospect before him. Suddenly she said—

“Don't let the bustle of London life make you an old man before your time Ewen.”

He laughed, a little constrainedly. “Do you see any symptoms, ma'am?” he queried, lightly.

“Yes,” answered my candid sister. “You are nearly ten years older since this time last year. Now I should not speak of this, if it were anything you could not help, but I believe it can be helped. Nobody has any right to be spendthrift in his energies and emotions.”

“But, Ruth,” I said, “business sometimes compels——”

“I don't say any one is not to be ‘diligent in business,’” she interrupted. “But I believe the methodical exercise energy gets in business proves only strengthening development, at least while energy is young and fresh. And besides, if it be spent for any adequate return, it is well spent. If a clock wear out in keeping time, it has done

its work. But if it be worn out, by the hands whirling round the dial sixty times a day, then it is wasted. And so is all energy expended in emotion."

"Ruth," I exclaimed, "do you mean that one may prevent himself suffering?"

"Yes, I do," she answered; "at least to a certain degree. Mental pain is subject to the same conditions as bodily pain, which any one can either alleviate or aggravate. If a man unbinds a wound, and thinks about it, and reads about his disease, and twists the hurt limb to test the extent of the injury, he suffers for it. So if a man sets up a sorrow as a shrine where he may worship, and walks round it to survey it from all sides, and draws all his life about it, and reads fiction and poetry to see what others say of the same, then he also suffers for it."

"But sorrow should scarcely be shunned like a sin," I said.

“And it should not be courted like a virtue,” she returned. “God-sent sorrow is an angel in mourning. But any sorrow which we may rightfully escape, is not God-sent. Sometimes, in old days, I’ve wished to cry, but couldn’t, because I had to go into the shop. And by the time the shop was closed I was braver, and did not want to cry.”

“But the tears would have been a relief,” I said, “and you certainly suffered no less because they might not come.”

“But I was stronger for the self-control,” she answered, “and you remember—

‘Not enjoyment and not sorrow
Is our destined end or way:
But to act, that each to-morrow
Finds us farther than to-day.’

But though I quote poetry,” she added, turning to Ewen with a smile, “I don’t advise you to read it. It’s not that you want now. Build with granite before you

clothe with creepers. Read Bacon, and Montaigne, and Rollin, and Shakspeare. He's a poet, you say? Yes, my dear, but he's a dramatist. He does not tell us how bitterly he feared Anne Hathaway would reject him. He says nothing about himself. He was above it, he had better things to say. So he don't make us, his readers, think of ourselves, rather he lifts us out of self. But leave all other poets till you are growing bald, then you will want them to remind you of what you were. If they moisten your eyes then, it will do you good. Why, Mr. M'Callum," she said, pointing to our bookcase, "there are books on those shelves which I have never dared to read since I was eighteen until—not very long ago!"

My dear, enduring sister!

Ewen stayed with us that night until nine o'clock, and we saw him two or three times afterwards during his brief holidays. But that visit was the only lengthened one

which he paid us. For I would not give him a set invitation, as I knew his punctilious conscientiousness would accept it, however much he might prefer the society of his grandfather and sister.

But I met him in my walks, and one day, as we were strolling down a lane, rather silently, it occurred to me to inquire if Miss Herbert had forwarded her promised letter.

“Yes,” he answered, so briskly that I thought he was about to make some further remark, but he did not.

“And I hope you can help her with the address?” I said.

“The letter has reached its destination by this time,” he replied.

“I am glad of it,” I observed, just for the sake of politeness.

“So am I,” he responded, rather drily.

“Miss Herbert is a very lovely girl,” I went on in my prim old-fashioned way, “but

having spent so much of her life in London, I almost think she suffers from the monotony of country existence."

"Perhaps she does," said Ewen, "but though one can see when something is wrong, it is hard to guess rightly what it is. Now, I see there is something amiss with Alice, and yet I supposed Alice was so happy!"

"And so she is," I answered, "only, as the healthiest are sometimes ailing, so the happiest are sometimes sad. Life, like a portrait, must have its shadows. But the good are never miserable, though they may suffer very keenly through the sins of others, or for their sakes."

"Ay, and how far may that suffering extend?" he asked, rather bitterly.

"Never farther than the valley of the shadow of death," I answered.

That was the last time I saw Ewen before he returned to London. On the day of his

departure, I proposed that we should take a walk towards the station, and so have a chance of seeing the last of him. But Ruth said "No, leave him to his own relations. Partings are long remembered, and so they may like to remember they had it all to themselves."

CHAPTER II.

A PROGRAMME.

THAT year we enjoyed a singularly fine autumn, with but little mist or moisture; consequently it was a healthy season, and the resources of our little hospital were not prematurely tried. Also, it furthered the speedy and satisfactory completion of the Refuge Orphan rooms, which were at last put in perfect readiness for any who might need them during the coming months. Over these things Ruth and I had many a quiet chat in the dusky twilight of our parlour, and we thanked God we had not quite done with the world, however the world had done with us. When I say "world," reader, I do not mean that narrow crust of society

which is often implied thereby. I mean God's whole creation, "the earth and the fulness thereof."

Nevertheless we were rather lonely that autumn. We saw nothing of Mr. Weston after our memorable interview in the meadows. He did not come again to St. Cross, but in the course of some incidental conversation, I heard with regret that he had been seen at the Puseyite church at Hopeleigh. But it was still early in October when Mr. Marten paid us an afternoon call, and promptly accepted our invitation to tea. And though he stated he had a little difficulty which he wished to discuss with us, he looked so flourishing and content, that it was very plain the "difficulty" gave him no undue disturbance. Indeed, it proved to be only a feeling on his part that it was the duty of the leaders in the parish in some way to direct their juniors' evening occupations and amusements during the coming winter.

“In short,” he went on, “if St. Cross is to maintain its ground, we must certainly do something. The Hopleigh people are very energetic in this matter. They have established a series of lectures, penny readings, &c., varied with entertainments, and soirées, and concerts. Besides these, they have opened classes, presenting a very attractive course of study for almost nominal fees.”

Just then I happened to glance at Ruth behind the tea-urn, and I saw a storm gathering in her face. When Mr. Marten ceased, there was an ominous pause. Then Ruth said, grimly—

“If you give children sugar-plums every day, they are never a treat, and they spoil their teeth into the bargain. That’s a figure of speech for you, Mr. Marten.”

“Why, Miss Garrett,” exclaimed the rector, “surely you don’t disapprove of innocent and improving recreations?”

“I disapprove of ‘gadding about,’” she

answered, severely. "I disapprove of everything which makes folks at home when they are out, and strangers when they are at home. In short, I disapprove of dissipation, whatever mask it may wear."

"I hope you don't see things in this light, sir," said Mr. Marten, turning to me.

"Not altogether," I replied, "but I am a slow person, and I weigh matters very leisurely."

"I wonder what had become of my business if I had taken to lectures, and classes, and so forth!" exclaimed my sister.

"Ruth, Ruth," I said, gently, "remember that we must not carry our personalities too far in these affairs."

"Well, it's one way of getting at a bit of truth," she returned, "and I always fear to advise others to do what I never did myself. It's like holding out a cup and saying, 'I know that would poison me, but I think it will be good medicine for you.'"

“ You must remember, Miss Garrett,” said the rector, “ that some homes are not very attractive. Think of the many one-roomed homes, with few books and no intelligent conversation.”

“ Mr. Marten, Mr. Marten,” I repeated warningly, “ has that good song gone out of fashion,—

‘ Be it ever so homely,
There’s no place like home?’

But at the same time I willingly grant that home is often all the dearer for short absences, even as such short absences are more enjoyable for the sake of the dear home where they will end.”

“ And again,” Mr. Marten went on, inclining his head in acknowledgment of my words, “ there are many young people who are utterly homeless.”

“ That is true,” said Ruth, “ but for the sake of the future they should be encouraged as much as possible to form homely habits.

If bachelors or spinsters cannot settle to books or work in their lonely rooms, I fear they will fret at the stay-at-home ways of comfortable matrimony, when once its novelty has worn off."

"Well, I'm sorry to find you see another side to this matter," observed the rector; "for to me, these evening lectures and classes seemed such a splendid means for mental improvement and moral elevation."

"Can you give us any details of the Hopleigh programme?" I inquired; "for until one knows all, one may differ about theories rather than facts."

"Oh, I can tell you all about it," he responded, briskly tugging at his pocket. "See! I came armed with all necessary documents!" and he produced sundry printed bills, and spread them out on the table.

"Take one by one, and read each aloud, please," requested Ruth, suddenly shifting

her knitting needles and beginning another row.

I have a strange notion that my sister's knitting is to her strength of mind, something like Samson's hair to his bodily prowess. Whenever we two are in argument, I have a wild wish to snatch that mysterious web from her agile fingers. Besides, its very continuance daunts one with the reproach—"Behold, in spite of all your idle clatter, these needles go on, and so does the world!"

"Which shall I take first?" queried the rector. "There are a prospectus of the classes, a programme of the lectures, and a list of the discussions."

"Read whichever you like," said I.

"Then I'll read the paper of the classes," he answered; and so began the sheet with its very heading:—

"Hopleigh College. Under this name, it is proposed to establish a course of evening

classes. The subjects chosen, with the names of the gentlemen who have kindly undertaken to teach them, will recommend themselves. Monday, Latin and English Composition (by Mr. Seneca Moon); Tuesday, French (by M. Vert); Wednesday, Elementary Singing; Thursday, Writing and Arithmetic (by Mr. Seneca Moon); Friday, Reading and Elocution (by Mr. O'Toole); Saturday, Advanced Singing. Hours from eight to ten o'clock. Fee for one class, two shillings each month; for the whole course, eight shillings. Entrance fee, one shilling. Intending members are invited to enrol as soon as possible. Under the especial patronage of the Rev. Ambrose Angelo, Rector of S. Cyprian, Hopleigh."

"You see, Miss Garrett," the rector commented, when he had finished, "this is not even innocent recreation, but improving study."

"I doubt whether it is either 'improving'

or 'study,' ” she answered, taking up his words a little tartly. “I suppose girls are included in these classes. I wonder if the clergyman would like his own daughter to run through the streets after nightfall in that way.”

“A distinction must be made between certain ranks, madam,” returned Mr. Marten, rather stiffly.

“That is what I always say,” assented Ruth. “But let the distinction be in acquirements rather than in manners or morals !”

“But some of these classes go to the very rudiments of education,” pursued the rector : “reading, for instance, and writing and arithmetic. If by some evil chance these were neglected in childhood, would you suffer the girl or boy to go on in ignorance, Miss Garrett ?”

She answered thoughtfully, “No : reading and writing are almost like two extra

senses. They are worth some sacrifice. But what poor servant girl, sensible in spite of her ignorance, would venture to 'Hopleigh College?' And would she study A B C in the first hour, and then learn how to spout 'My name is Norval' during the remainder of the time? And would she be much at ease in the society of the smart shop-girls, who would come to practise rant, and who would attend the French and Latin classes on the other evenings?"

"But I think these institutions are really for the benefit of a higher class than common servants or ploughboys," said Mr. Marten, "and for such how serviceable is French, and how useful the power of writing a correct letter!"

"Thorough French is a valuable acquirement," returned Ruth, "and a good letter is a sure sign of a sound education. But mere 'lingo' is ridiculous, and a 'phrase' epistle is an abomination. Perhaps you will add, that

even superficial French may be useful in business ; but if poor M. Vert is willing to teach it for two shillings a month, can the scholars expect to make it more profitable than the master ?”

“ But M. Vert, who is a working professor, would not teach at that rate, except for a consolation-fee from the committee,” exclaimed the rector.

“ I hate that false method of cheapening good things,” answered my sister. “ If an acquirement be worth anything, it is worth its price, and let those who desire it, deny themselves to pay that price. All who can derive advantage from it will readily do so. Those who want pearls dive for them, and shall others take them to throw before swine ?”

There was a pause. Then I inquired what were the other arrangements.

“ They have a fortnightly lecture,” replied Mr. Marten, taking up another paper. “ The

Rev. Ambrose Angelo will deliver one on Ecclesiastical History; and Mr. Senecca Moon, the principal of Hopleigh Academy, will give another on Meteorology. On two evenings there will be Readings from Popular Authors by various gentlemen, among them Mr. Daniel O'Toole, and Mr. Smith—[“Rather vague,” murmured Ruth]. And on Christmas-eve there will be a vocal and instrumental concert, for which the bill says, ‘many ladies and gentlemen have promised assistance.’”

“I think the lectures are too dry,” I said; “and they are certainly subjects of which ‘a little knowledge’ is very useless.”

“But how nice to hear about a word which ordinary folk cannot pronounce!” observed Ruth, ironically, laying down her knitting, and taking a book from the little bracket which always stood on her work-table. “Met-e-o-ro-lo-gy,” she repeated, turning over the leaves. “Dear me! I fear

Dr. Johnson's ideas on the subject were nearly as misty as mine ; for he only defines it as 'the doctrine of meteors.' "

"But I must say I like the 'Readings from Popular Authors,' I remarked. "In themselves they are amusing, and they are well calculated to awaken a desire for further information."

"That is quite true," said my sister ; "but they should only be entrusted to people whose age and position qualify them for the teacher's desk. Otherwise the parish schoolroom simply becomes the scene of bad amateur theatricals."

"Then what do you say to the concert?" inquired Mr. Marten.

I answered—"Only this : that men are always too ready to speak lightly of those women who, having real musical gifts, display them for hire to maintain themselves and their dependents. The gift may stir in their souls, the remuneration may mean home and

household happiness, but the audience listens and applauds and slights. It is not right ! Publicity is a dire necessity to those women—the dark side of their profession, which must be accepted with the bright one. But what of girls who, without their gifts and unneeding their pay, court the common eye and the common clap ? Sir, I belong to the old-fashioned days, when a woman's pretty accomplishments were kept for those who loved her, and when a young lassie, safe and happy in the retreat of her father's house, would have blushed to see her name printed in bills and stuck up on walls and shop-windows."

"And the old-fashioned notions were certainly right," said my sister, with a little sigh ; "but in spite of them all, there were young girls, and young girls then as now ! Yet need we meddle with what we cannot mend ?"

"We only criticise these matters to guide

our own actions," I answered. "Have you any more announcements, Mr. Marten?"

"There is also a discussion class," he replied, with a slight hesitation. "The paper says it is held in the boys' schoolroom at Hopleigh, every Friday evening at eight o'clock, and it announces the four discussions for the month of November. The first will be opened by your friend Mr. Weston, of Mallowe, the subject being, 'Is not the single state most conducive to happiness?'"

Ruth and I both looked up in such startled amazement, that it might almost have betrayed the confidence the young man had reposed in us.

"Can any one attend these discussions?" my sister asked, quietly.

"Oh, certainly," returned the rector; "and the other subjects are, 'Was Robert Emmett a patriot?' opened by Mr. O'Toole; 'The advantages of Co-operation,' by Mr. Smith."

“The exciseman, I suppose?” queried Ruth.

“I believe so,” said Mr. Marten, “and the Rev. Ambrose Angelo closes the list with the knotty question, ‘Is the Protestant Church a Catholic Church?’”

“And now,” I remarked, “we must come to the point, and consider what part of this intellectual machinery we can best adapt to St. Cross.”

“Don’t have any ‘discussion,’” said my sister, shaking her head, “they only encourage a parcel of foolish boys to spout nonsense, which they will wish forgotten when they are grown older and wiser.”

“I cannot say I like them,” assented the rector, “for I think they only give occasion to a certain order of minds to display their powers by triumphantly making the worst appear the better cause.”

“We will put them out of the question,”

I said, "and let us reflect what we can do in the way of evening classes."

"Let us have two," rejoined my sister, "one for youths, and one for young women; and let the instruction be confined to reading, writing, and simple arithmetic, and let each class meet twice weekly. It is hopeless to teach reading by one lesson a week."

"I am sure I shall be very happy to take one class," said Mr. Marten.

"That would be a mistake," answered Ruth. "Your attentions would be voluntary and you would either demand no fee, or the fees would be devoted to some parochial use. Now honest young people don't like to be recipients of charity. Besides, amateur teaching, like everything that is amateur, is none of the best. Let somebody be paid to teach, or better still, let him receive the fees, and it will become his interest to make the classes as attractive and serviceable as possible."

“It must be a low nature that would not do so without such stimulus,” observed Mr. Marten.

“Ah, but we must not ignore the natural propensity towards evil,” said my sister; “and I don’t see there is any wrong in making the right easy and pleasant. For which reason, I will promise a prize for the best girl-scholar. And it shall be no sham prize either.”

“And I’ll promise one for the best boy,” I added; “and now what shall we do about the lectures?”

“In the first place, don’t have them too often,” said my sister. “It only destroys their interest, and all home-comfort into the bargain.”

“Let us have them but once a month,” I said, “and let them be genuine ‘recreations.’ I don’t think that poor tired heads are benefited by hearing dates and statistics. Mine never was. Let us have something to draw

out blithe, honest, innocent laughter, which leaves the heart larger than it found it. Let us have tears sometimes, those sympathetic tears which are the best cure for our own unspoken sorrows. In short, let us be as *human* as possible."

"And shall we never have a concert?" queried the rector, rather regretfully; "and music is *so* popular!"

"And such an agent for good," I rejoined, warmly; "though I don't think any of God's blessings is so fearfully perverted. The exercise of that gift which we specially connect with the glories of heaven, but too often becomes a temptation to vanity, and frivolity, and worse!"

"Ah," said Ruth, "I went to a village concert once, and I saw the singer girls sitting in a row in their best dresses, which were too fine for their owners' pockets, and in one or two cases, not very modest in taste. And when I heard the village audi-

ence—their little world—whispering of the beauty of this one, and the dress of the other, and the voice of a third, I could not forget the old saying, that ‘a woman’s true honour was not to be spoken about!’”

“Then let us always have singing at the lectures,” I said, “just as we have at church. Let us take some familiar airs, such as ‘Rule, Britannia,’ ‘Auld Lang-syne,’ and so forth, and sing them in the course of the evening, the assembly standing, and all who can joining.”

“Ah,” said Ruth, “I think that might give a greater love and taste for music than a few young people on a platform practising airs and graces, and striking up ‘In Celia’s Arbour,’ and so on, which means nothing at all to ignorant people like me, who listen with our hearts instead of our ears.”

“And then we can always conclude with the dear old doxology,” I remarked.

“But may not that seem rather irreverent sometimes?” queried my sister.

“Never!” I replied, “if we have been merry, we shall sing,—

‘Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,’

and include our mirth and laughter among those blessings. The same apostle who asks, ‘Is any among you afflicted? let him pray,’ adds, ‘Is any merry? let him sing psalms.’”

There was a short silence, which Ruth broke by saying—

“Edward, at Christmas time, let us have a genuine party; not a tea-meeting, nor a *soirée*, but a thorough old-fashioned hospitable party, with games and forfeits, and music, and all good cheer. We have no room in this house sufficiently large, or I should like it to be in a private dwelling, even better than in the great room of the Refuge. But I fancy Mr. Herbert could be brought to

favour that scheme, and his noble dining-room would be the right place.”

“At any rate we can ask him,” I said; “and then, if he will not consent, we can but take refuge in the Refuge;” and I laughed at my own little joke.

“And are you quite satisfied with all these plans, Mr. Marten?” I inquired presently; “I almost fear you think them too homely and simple.”

“No,” he answered, starting from a reverie into which he had fallen, “for I was just thinking that when we clergymen enter upon our duties fresh from collegiate cloisters, we are too apt to forget the claims of home, and to ignore the heavenward end of secular duties, and I fear many of my brethren persevere in this mistake to the very end. They do not realize that they are only set aside for a special purpose, and so they constantly strive to draw people from their own line of work and study into theirs.”

“ Yes,” returned Ruth, “ and even more, they often seem to forget that God made the world, and so speak of his appointments as if they were hindrances on the road to Him. They literally say, with Thomas à Kempis (hand me his book, Edward), ‘ O that thou mightest never have need to eat, or drink, or sleep : but mightest always praise God, and only employ thyself in spiritual exercises : thou shouldst then be much more happy than now thou art, when for so many necessities, thou art constrained to serve thy body.’ And the good man constantly repeats that mistake in his otherwise beautiful ‘ Imitation of Christ,’ forgetting that He worked in the carpenter’s shop, and went to the marriage feast, and wept at Lazarus’s grave. How different to the Scripture precept, ‘ Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God !’ The one comes to us like a draught from a cathedral crypt,

and the other like a breeze from the hills!"

And so our long consultation drew to an end, and when the rector had departed, and we had drawn our chairs close together to partake of our cosy little supper, Ruth gave me a sly side glance, and said—

“We will both be present when Mr. Weston opens that wonderful discussion!”

CHAPTER III.

COMING EVENTS AND SHADOWS BEFORE.

RUTH looked eagerly forward to the display of Mr. Weston's oratory, wondering what he would say, and how he would look when he saw us. It seemed but a little thing, but we knew it concerned the futures of two, whose welfare we desired, and besides we had now reached that happy resting-place when the feelings are only stirred by the interests of others. And so I was quite ready to echo my sister's expectations and conjectures.

But our sympathies and counsels were destined to be evoked in other directions besides. About noon on the day of the discussion, Agnes Herbert paid us a visit. I saw her cross the garden at a brisk pace,

and when Phillis admitted her, her step in the hall was less noiseless, and her voice higher than usual. In short, her whole aspect had brightened, and the very expression of her face went far to fulfil the prophecy which the flickering firelight had revealed to me a year before. She had donned her winter garments, and her bonnet was enlivened by a ribbon of pure scarlet, in place of the sombre mixtures which she had hitherto affected. Altogether she was as much changed from her former self, as is a darkened room when the curtains are suddenly drawn aside to admit the sunshine.

And yet she was the bearer of uncomfortable tidings, with the misery of which she strongly sympathized. But there was the difference. At an earlier date, her sympathy would have been true, but listless—the sympathy which sits down by the sufferer, and says, “It is a weary world—let us endure together.” Now it was aroused and

active, busily inquiring, "What can be done?"

The evil was nothing more nor less than Anne Sanders, and the misfortune was that the young stranger, who had taken Bessie's place, had called at the hospital, complaining that she must resign her position; she found the business good, and the house comfortable, but the housekeeper was like the fly in the ointment, which spoiled all. She could not enter into Anne's shortcomings; they were of that almost indefinite kind which pervade life, and make it unendurable, without leaving behind any distinct mark.

Agnes had also visited the hospital, and had found Bessie in great trouble about this disturbing communication. Bessie seemed to have placed much confidence in our pretty friend. Perhaps she preferred to open her mind to a young creature of whose sympathy she was sure, yet who could not fancy

she claimed more than sympathy. Doubtless it soothed her lonely heart to let her memory wander back to those earlier days when her kindred was not centred in the narrow, selfish sister, who could neither love nor be loved. For she had evidently spoken to Agnes of the dead Katie and her unhappy lover, and of all the pleasant budding hopes which had once promised fairly to bloom into realities. As Miss Herbert repeated the sorrows of Bessie Sanders, I could see her feelings were touched, and there was earnest solicitude in her question,

“What can be done?”

“Does Miss Sanders suggest anything?”

I inquired, in return.

Agnes looked up deprecatingly. “She says it will be her duty to go back to Anne, as of course Anne cannot be received at the hospital,” she answered. “But oh, Mr. Garrett, do you think it can be God’s will

that any one should submit for ever to the ceaseless tyranny of an evil nature?"

"Whatever Mr. Garrett may think, Miss Garrett does not think so," replied Ruth; "and besides, Anne is not benefited by Bessie's sacrifice. When kindness fails, severity may succeed. Let her leave Bessie's successor in undisturbed possession, and go into some lodging in the village, until she can find a suitable position."

"Will she ever do so?" I queried, shaking my head.

"I don't know," answered my sister. "But that scheme will certainly gain us a little time; and very often the world comes round to those who will but wait."

"Yes, I think it does," said Agnes, with a bright glance, like that of one suddenly assenting in the solution of an old problem.

"I will put on my bonnet and shawl, and go about the matter directly," remarked my energetic sister. "I wont ask you to

come with me, Agnes, for that miserable woman is likely to put one out of patience with human nature, and you are young, and must endure it for a long time."

And so Miss Herbert and I were left together. The newspaper was on the table, and I took it up and started some topic of public interest. I forget what it was, but it was something about which I held peculiar notions, and I began to explain them, meantime holding up the paper, and interspersing my oration with sundry sentences therein, which I thought to agree with my views. I talked on with great animation, till I made some observation which called for an answer. Then I paused; but none came. I dropped the paper. Agnes sat opposite me, her scarlet strings untied, and her hands, loosely holding her gloves, lying in her lap. But her thoughts were not with me and my politics, for her lips were parted with a soft, slight smile, and her eyes had

the far-off look of young eyes when they gaze into the future, and fancy they catch glimpses of angels walking in its mists. But the rustling paper recalled her to the present, and she hastily tried to take up the broken thread of my discourse. But where it had fallen, there I let it lie; and so there was silence.

Suddenly she rose and came towards me, and stood beside my chair. Then she paused, and I did not look at her till she whispered in a very girlish voice—

“Mr. Garrett, you are not angry?”

“Angry, my dear!” I exclaimed; “am I such a cantankerous old stick, that you imagine anger is my natural condition?”

“No, sir,” she answered, with a little laugh. “But I was so rude a minute ago, and I can’t excuse myself, for I was only thinking about my own affairs!”

“Well, my dear,” I replied, “and if you would talk about them, and let me have a

share in them, I'm sure I would not trouble you with the leading articles."

"I want to ask your advice and help," she said, with downcast eyes.

"O-ho," thought I, "must the old bachelor intercede with the stern uncle?" But I merely said, "I can only say, Miss Herbert, that you are heartily welcome to the best I can give."

She went back to her seat, as if to gain a moment to choose her words. I was all attention. And this was what she said—

"I should like my father's best writings to be collected and made into a small volume."

I had expected something very different; but I bowed my head, and assented. "A very dutiful wish, my dear. And have you any hope of its fulfilment?"

"I have gone very carefully through his pieces," she said, "and I have selected the best. You see I remember his opinions

of them," she added, as if excusing her temerity, "and I have made copies of them, embracing alterations which he wrote on their margins, and I have added two or three which remained unpublished when he died. I think they will make a very nice book. But I should not like to send it to a publisher without somebody else seeing it. Will you look over it, Mr. Garrett?" and opening a little leathern reticule, she produced the manuscript, and handed it to me.

It was of considerable size, and the writing was not of that deceptive, scrawling kind which spreads two or three words over a page. It was firm, compact calligraphy, not as characteristic as Ewen M'Callum's, but as easy to read as print. I have a respect for good writing, by which I mean *plain* writing. Illegible scribble is selfish and rude, implying that the reader's time is less valuable than the writer's. In literary

matters, I cannot but think plain writing must be advantageous ; for even editors are human, and the man who can wade through a manuscript novel when he must pore over every word, need be above the frailties to which ordinary flesh is liable.

“ Have you spoken to Mr. Herbert about your wish to publish this ? ” I inquired.

“ Yes, ” she answered.

“ And he consents ? ” I queried.

“ He leaves me at liberty to do so, ” she replied : her conscientious nature drawing a distinction between consent and mere permission.

“ You will pass the day with us, my dear ? ” I said.

“ Uncle said I might, ” she returned ; and thus she accepted my invitation, and put aside her bonnet and mantle. I continued to look over the manuscript, and when next I glanced at my fair companion, she was seated in the easy chair, busily employed in

—what? Darning stockings! I think my head gave a little involuntary shake. There was a change in the girl—a change which made her think of housewifery and practical life. God bless her! What jumps my heart always gave whenever Lucy Weston talked of what she would do if she became the mistress of a house! But Agnes Herbert is not like Lucy. Her nature is perhaps stronger, but she is not half as sweet.

“You wish to be paid for this book, I suppose?” I said, still turning over its leaves.

“Oh yes,” she answered, decidedly; “and it will be as money left me by my father—the nest-egg of my fortunes, sir;” and she laughed, but not quite merrily; and neither of us spoke again until Ruth came back.

“I have settled it all,” exclaimed my sister, as she came in; “and Anne Sanders is fairly lodged in a room in the High Street,

where she can disgrace nobody but herself. The young dressmaker helped her to pack up her belongings, and she parted from her quite kindly, just because she was so glad to part from her! And such a mess as her things were, I never saw. There were good lace collars run to rags for want of a stitch; and cuffs, and mantles, and bonnets all suffered to lie useless, because she was too idle to alter and re-model. Oh, I spoke to her! 'You'll be sorry for your life when it's too late!' I said. 'What have I done?' she cried out. 'What have I done?' 'Miss Anne Sanders,' I answered, 'you have done *nothing*, and that is your crime; for whoever does nothing does evil; and I wish you were a little child, that I might give you a whipping!''

And my sister dropped into a chair in an exhausted way quite uncommon for her, and then drew a long breath, like one who has just gone through unusual and straining exertion.

But the minute she sat down, her quick eye observed Agnes' work. "I'm glad to see you so well employed, my dear," she said; "and are you a good darning? Let me see? Yes. And do you like it?"

"I don't always like it," answered Agnes; "but just now I do."

"Then you should always like it," retorted Ruth. "Don't form the habit of whims, and fits, and starts. When you like your duty, praise God for the blessing; and when you don't like it, pray God for his help. Anyhow, do it all the same."

"But can we always be sure what is our duty?" asked Agnes, very softly, while a faint shadow crept over her face.

"I won't deny there are some puzzling cases," returned Ruth; "but we needn't vex ourselves about them until we've done the little bit that is quite plain before us, and few of us get through that. And what are you reading, Edward?" she inquired.

“Poetry? In Miss Herbert’s writing? Child,” she asked, severely, “surely you don’t write poetry?”

“No, indeed,” said Agnes, laughing. “It is my father’s.”

“Ah, I’m glad it’s not yours,” answered Ruth, taking the book from me. “If a woman lives poetry, that is quite enough. If she write it, I fear lest it evaporate at her fingers’ ends. Thank God you’re not a genius, Agnes; but don’t thank him in the Pharisee’s fashion. Genius is God’s great gift; but too often it is over-heavy for a woman’s hand.”

I fear Agnes had a somewhat quiet day, but I don’t suppose she regretted our silence, since we were absorbed in her father’s writings. Generally, when a tale or a poem touched either of us, it was handed to the other, and perused in silence, and then commented on. But once Ruth raised her head, and said—

“Edward, listen;” and so she read :—

“NOT WITHOUT HOPE.”

They say you are not as you were
In days of long ago :
That clouds came o'er your sun at noon,
And dimmed its golden glow.

Yet every gentler word I say,
Each gentler deed I do,
Is but a blossom on the grave
Where sleeps my love for you.

And can a weed bring forth a flower ?
Or blight bear beauty ? Nay,
This darkness is but short eclipse
To surely pass away.

Though one by one my early friends
Have faded from my prayer,
Your name was always first and last,
And still it lingers there.

I love but dearer for my fears,
And prayers for such an one :
I think God does not love us less
For costing Him his Son.

And I believe when death shall break
This spell of human pain,
The love that I to God entrust
He'll give to me again.

“There!” said Ruth, with a swell of suppressed emotion in her voice. “Nothing can improve *that*, Edward.”

So I thought then. I have read it since, and not cared for it at all, except for the memory of my first impression. But my sister’s reading put a soul into the dry bones—yea, her own soul, for was it not the story of her life?

“I remember when my father wrote it,” said Agnes, thoughtfully: “I was but a little girl, and I thought it must be quite true. And when my hour came—my hour was between the sunlight and the candles—I asked him who it meant; surely not mamma, for he had always told me she was safe in heaven, waiting for us. And then he first explained to me that genius must rise beyond and above its own experience—must let itself out of itself, and alike comprehend the calm of a saint’s heart, and the tortures of a malefactor’s conscience. In short,

he taught me that the power to do thus is genius itself. But he added, he did not believe even genius could catch the secrets of a character above itself, and that man's loftiest conception revealed the highest possibility of his own nature. He might degrade it, but it was still in him—his ideal—the image of God as reflected in the mirror of the individual soul. I did not understand him then, and I fancy he only spoke to clear his own thoughts from misty silence. But I remembered his words, and I think I understand them now. And I think they are true."

"I think so," I replied; "and if so, then the higher a man's best conception, the wider the range below it. And thus he who gives us Brutus, gives us also Bardolph."

"Of course," said Ruth, "or a man's mind would be like Isaac Newton's door, with a large hole for the cat, and a small one for the kitten."

There was a moment's pause. Then Agnes said, "Ewen M'Callum will be a great man."

"I believe so," I answered.

"But what makes you say it?" queried Ruth.

"Because he has the greatness which makes a man great even following the plough," she replied, with flushing face and quivering lips; "and then he has genius to be the voice of that greatness. Some great souls are dumb, and only God can understand their signs!"

"Has your London friend, to whom he carried your letter, made any acquaintance with him?" I inquired.

"That is how I learnt to praise him!" she returned. "I hear enough—enough—to make me speak as I do, but—they—say there is something beyond—something I must not know, which eclipses all I may know. And from what I do

know, I can believe him equal to anything.”

She spoke with some excitement, which betrayed itself in the reiteration of her words. Then with great energy she resumed her darning. Glancing at Ruth, I saw she was gazing at Agnes. She too could see the change in the girl—a change which, as the day wore on, grew more manifold. There was no further outburst of the enthusiasm pent within her, but her mind, her whole nature, was awake. She forestalled my sister's movements; she asked the recipe for a pudding which appeared on our dinner-table; she took an active part in each domestic matter. Ruth was charmed. If Agnes would have remained in our house for the evening, I am sure my sister would willingly have forgone even the long-expected discussion. But Miss Herbert was resolved to return to the Great Farm before tea. She sustained her new character

to the last moment of her visit, showing Ruth her winter bonnet, and proudly explaining that it was but a renovation of last year's, and that the fashion of its shape and trimming were all due to her own skill.

“She has in her the making of a good housewife,” said my sister, when she was gone; “and I think it will come out. But she's not the woman to be a manager for management's sake.”

“For whose sake, then?” I asked, slyly.

“For the sake of some worthless man,” retorted Ruth; “and the more he gives her to manage, the better she'll like him. Did you see how her fingers twittered about her engaged ring every time she dropped her work? Engaged ring, indeed! Engaged rubbish!”

So we set off to Hopeleigh in our little pony-chaise, and we reached the schoolroom of St. Cyprian in such very good time, that

nobody else was there. Slowly, the audience straggled in. At last came Mr. Weston. He lingered in the outer room to speak to an acquaintance, and while so doing I saw his eyes fall on us. Just then, some of my sister's old friends, from Mallowe, entered and surrounded us, and hid him from our sight. Presently the assembly got into order: there was expectant silence, but no Mr. Weston. Then an attendant mysteriously stepped about the room, adjusting windows and blinds, after the fashion of attendants, to screen unpunctuality. Again expectant silence, but still no Mr. Weston. At last the Rev. Ambrose Angelo, a spare, sallow youth in a very prim collar, stood up, and said that he feared some unforeseen circumstance had prevented the appearance of our estimable friend, and that the discussion must proceed in the absence of its promoter. His motion was seconded, and the discussion proceeded. It proved no discus-

sion at all—only an outpouring of sentiment, none of the speakers, on either side, ever forgetting the presence of the reverend gentleman—a saintly and confirmed celibate of five-and-twenty—a novice in the class of life to which he had been raised by the liberality of a theological college. For how, in the light of his mild spectacled eyes, could any farmer or tradesman dare to suggest that a littered noisy family-room might be nearer Heaven, and a better school for self-denial, than his ascetic chambers, with their sacred pictures and crosses, and their constant influx of illuminated texts, wherewith the young ladies of St. Cyprian faithfully fortified the piety of the Reverend Augustine?

When the discussion was over, and it was satisfactorily proved that God was best served by a state of things which would bring his world to a speedy end, the assembly dispersed, and we heard many

conjectures about the non-appearance of Mr. Weston.

“He was here,” said somebody: “for I spoke to him outside.”

“He must have been sent for afterwards,” remarked another; “but it’s strange he did not leave a message: only perhaps he did not expect to be detained.”

“Ah, his good sense came back to him,” whispered Ruth, griping my arm, “and he could scarcely send that message into a roomful of people!”

“A wasted evening, Ruth,” I said, as we re-entered our dwelling.

“No, indeed,” she returned: “we have saved an honest man from making a fool of himself!”

CHAPTER IV.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

NOT very long after that memorable evening when Mr. Weston was conspicuous by his absence, I paid a visit to the M'Callums at the Refuge. That morning's post had brought me a letter from Ewen, and I always gave them the benefit of the last news from him.

I found the High-street in a little bustle. Curious faces peeped from doors and windows. The object of interest was an old-fashioned, ungainly carriage standing in front of a little hosiery shop. Now it was above this shop that Ruth had found lodgings for Anne Sanders.

Mr. M'Callum himself was at the gate,

with a comical smile on his cheerful old face.

“It’s an ill wind that blows naebody guid,” said he, admitting me; “but it’s no often there’s a guid wind that blows naebody ill.”

“What is the matter?” I asked.

“There’s just an auld leddy come to fetch away Miss Bessie’s sister,” he replied. “She’s an auld widow cousin of their mither’s, an’ she’s never luiked on the sisters before. But she says, for the credit of the family, she’ll no hear of the puir lassie being left to fight her ain way in a sair world. She has nae end o’ siller, and mayhap Miss Anne will come in for the a’ i’ the end.”

Looking across the road, I could see the lady standing in the hosier’s shop—a little woman, quaintly dressed, with her face almost hidden by a hood-like bonnet.

“Does she live far from here?” I asked.

“She lives in a queer little house on the side of Mallowe Heath,” he answered.

“In the parish of St. Cross?” I said. “Then I suppose I have seen her at church?” for there seemed something familiar in the little figure.

“Na, na,” returned Mr. M‘Callum, “she doesna gang to the kirk, but to a chapel on the heath, where she’s the richest and greatest leddy. She has neither child nor kith or kin save these Sanderses—but she isna the body to mind. Money canna buy love, but it can buy fear, and she has a mighty hard high spirit that’s weel satisfied wi’ that, pair body.”

“Does Miss Sanders know of her sister’s removal?” I asked, still watching the small angular form, with that uneasy interest we always feel when our memory is stirred we know not how.

“She’s over in the house wi’ her the noo,” replied Mr. M‘Callum. “But it’s a blessed

change to hae that fulish, ill-conceited being ta'en respectably aff her hands. What culd she do wi' her? She's ill to go and ill to guide. But that aye gaes wi'out saying, for the waur the fule, the better the mule."

"Do you think the old lady knows the character of her adopted friend?" I inquired.

The old man's merry eyes gave a sly wink. "I dinna think she cares," said he. "When ye're a certain age, and a crackit auld body tae the bargain, ye maun hae a body-servant; and whan ye hae tried a' the lasses i' the toon, and they hae a' run back to their mithers, and said ye might keep their bit wage sae ye let them gae free, then ye're owre glad to find onybody left. Miss Anne wad suit nae service, and the auld leddie would suit nae servant, and by the blessing o' God they hae found out each ither!"

Then I proceeded to give the grandfather his boy's messages. And I asked where

Alice was. She was upstairs at needlework, he said. In bygone days she would have come down directly she heard my voice; but the poor girl was just now passing through those trials which honest hearts bear best in solitude and silence.

While we stood at the gate, George Wilmot came in from his morning's work. In Mr. M'Callum's words, "the laddie was shooting up," and his blue eyes had gained quickness without losing their frank honesty. Now, when he was addressed, they did not fall, and his answer was ready, though the blush still came. As the wise old Scotchman said, "There was guid gowd in the callant, and guid gowd will aye brichten."

Just then, there was a bustle at the hosier's door. It was the moment of departure. Bessie came to the door-step, and there the two sisters shook hands. No warmer salutation. Bessie was very pale. Anne was fussy, and dropped her gloves,

and ran her umbrella at the side of the carriage. Bessie gave her arm to assist her aged relation down the steps. Then I first saw the lady's face. It was a yellow, dry face, with wizened lips and faded eyes, and no white in the thin, withered hair. But then I knew it had once been fair and comely, a face which I had coveted to confront me on my own hearth—ay, a face which I had once kissed truly and tenderly; alas! a face which afterwards I had almost cursed—for that haggard shrew was the remains of Maria Willoughby! Thank God that Lucy Weston was my first love, and lives safe with Him!

When they were gone, Miss Sanders crossed the road and spoke to us. She only said all had happened very fortunately, and she hoped Anne would be happy, and inquired after Ruth, and sent her dutiful regards to her. Then she drew down her veil, and went away.

“She has lost her torment, and yet she seems sad,” I remarked.

“It’s hard to hae kin to tease one,” said Mr. M’Callum; “but it’s harder to hae nane to please one. I reckon she’d give ten years of her life to hae a richt to ilka body who had a bit o’ love in them.”

But after the arrival of George Wilmot I feared lest I was keeping the good man from his dinner, so with a very few more words I left him, and went homewards in a somewhat sobered and saddened mood. However I had parted from Maria Willoughby, I could not forget how we had once met, and her re-appearance, an embittered, loveless old woman, sickened my spirit like a breath of clammy air from a tomb. What said Mr. M’Callum?—that money could not buy love? Ah, she had love once without thought of buying, and she threw it away! Does its ghost ever visit her? There are houses which stand so foul and

neglected, that passers-by say, "Surely they are haunted." And so there are faces which warn us not to ask the secrets of the hearts behind them. Poor Maria! poor Maria!

But just at my own gate, I was roused from my reverie by the stout voice of Mr. Herbert. His niece was with him, and they had come to pay us a visit. Somehow, Mr. Herbert had heard of the proposed gathering of the people of St. Cross, and he had actually come, unasked, to offer the use of his great dining-room for the occasion. I think he conferred the obligation in return for the little aid I had rendered Agnes; for I had transmitted her father's book to a friend of mine in Paternoster Row, who promised to give her a hundred pounds for it. The transaction was managed by Agnes and me, and it was never mentioned in the presence of her uncle, and he never mentioned it himself; but from his manner I concluded

his niece had kept no secret, though both he and she preferred a tacit silence on the subject.

“You and your worthy sister and Mr. Marten can invite the folks—who you like and as many as you like—the more the merrier,” said the bluff farmer. “The whole house is at your service, and so are Mrs. Irons and the girls, and I’ll provide the victuals—don’t fear I shan’t have enough.”

“We shall certainly want the whole house, sir,” returned my sister: “kitchen, parlours, dining-room, and all, for everybody must come; and I’m sure you’ll welcome nobody so kindly as some who will be most at home by the kitchen fire. We won’t place anybody, but we’ll give everybody a chance of placing himself. There are some that we should rise up before, Mr. Herbert, who would not thank us if we put them on cushioned chairs and Turkey carpet.”

“You’re a wise woman, Miss Garrett,” said he; “and, for my part, if I could only sit in my own kitchen, I shouldn’t be sorry. My great-grandfather was a better man than me, ma’am, and he sat there. Ah, ma’am, if we kept to the old ways we should be none the worse.”

“But at which old way shall we make a stand?” asked Ruth, drily. “The oldest ways in England were woad and acorns, and Druids and sacrifices.”

“Now, it strikes me you are laughing at me, Miss Garrett,” said the farmer, good-humouredly, “I thought you liked the old ways too?”

“I like some old ways,” Ruth answered, “but along with the good old ways there were bad old ways, and somehow I think the good old ways live longest. I don’t believe the world grows worse, Mr. Herbert.”

“Then do you think it grows better?” he asked, rather quickly.

She shook her head: "I wont say that either," she replied, "but I think it is like a child growing up. Its evil passions are still there, but they are kept under more restraint."

"You are a clever woman," he said, "and you get beyond me. I just like to keep in the beaten track, and do what my people did before me, and then, at least, I'm safe."

"I don't know that," returned Ruth, carrying on the figure, "you may be going over different soil, where a light wheel would travel better than a heavy one."

"A heavy wheel may be sometimes slow, but it's always sure," said he, "and that reminds me a waggon of mine is now at the wheelwright's, and I had best go and see after it."

He left Agnes behind him, saying he would send Mrs. Irons to fetch her in the course of the evening. The girl had not

expected this prolonged visit, and, as she had brought no work, she asked us to provide her with some, and so I set her to sort and endorse a basketful of old letters which I wished to keep. The task lasted all day, though she went through it with alacrity, and we were just going over the last papers, when there was a hasty rap at the door, and a moment after Phillis hurriedly announced "Miss Sanders," adding in a whisper, "She is crying, ma'am, and all in a flutter."

Bessie entered. She had lost no time on her toilet, for her bonnet was not tied, and her shawl was only thrown hastily round her. She had an open letter in her hand, which she laid before Ruth, and then stood, breathless, unheeding the chair which Phillis set for her.

My sister perused the document in silence, then, with a flash of astonished intelligence, she said, "Edward, listen to this," and read—

“DEAR MADAM,

“I feel it is my duty to tell you that the boy known in your village as George Wilmot, and now living at the Refuge, is the son of your dead cousin, George Roper, who was privately married in London under an assumed name. With this information to start from, I think you will soon trace a likeness between the two. I only disclose this as I think it will give happiness to both you and the lad. In token of my good intentions I enclose a sovereign for George Wilmot, not as a present, but as part payment of an old account between his father and me. And I can only sign myself,

“ONE WHO HAS MUCH TO REGRET.”

“There it is!” exclaimed Bessie, dropping the piece of gold on the table, and then, sinking on a seat, she gave way to a storm of hysteric tears and laughter, among which

the only intelligible words were, "Loneliness—ended—thank God—thank God!" She forgave her cousin's faithlessness to her sister's memory; she forgave his hidden marriage, and the deception in which he died. She thought only of a new right to love, of another call to live and labour!

We all examined the letter. It was in delicate upright writing, evidently the disguise of a refined, but perhaps egotistical hand. The postmark was St. Martin's-le-Grand, and there was no stationer's name on the envelope. The writer had known how to secure secrecy. Yet there was a simplicity about the letter and its enclosure which seemed to insure its truthfulness. Evidently Bessie Sanders did not doubt it. Presently she grew calm, and then arose, saying—

"I must go to the Refuge, and fetch him."

I prepared to go with her. Just as I put on my hat, Agnes Herbert whispered—

“Please take me with you, and leave me at the Great Farm as you pass.”

I looked down at the girl and was startled by her ashen face and wan eyes. “My dear,” I said, “I fear you have done too much to-day.”

“I am a little tired,” she answered, “but it’s not for that I want to go home; only if I go with you it will save Mrs. Irons a walk.”

So she went with us, and we left her at her uncle’s gate. I half-expected she would ask me to call in on my return, and tell her what passed at the Refuge, but she did not.

The M‘Callums and George were all comfortably seated in their little sitting-room. Our very appearance at that untimely season startled them, and our errand startled them more. They would fain have doubted the letter, but Bessie was terribly in earnest, and had brought her sister’s portrait, and there certainly was a likeness between it and the half-pleased, half-frightened boy, who

submitted rather timidly to his relation's caresses, and then stole back to Alice M'Callum.

Wherever his future home might be, Bessie implored that he might return with her that night, until, at last, with quivering lips, Alice prepared his little outfit. Then the old man blessed the boy, and Alice kissed him—quite calmly, until the garden-gate clanged behind the happy woman and the astonished lad, and then the gentle “matron” sat down, and wept bitterly—almost as bitterly as a mother when her first-born is carried from her arms to his grave.

“You must not grudge him to Miss Sanders,” I said as gently as I could, “she has nothing. You still have your grandfather and Ewen.”

“Yes, I know,” she sobbed. “And Ewen will never tire of me, but oh, I must keep away from him. For he will rise—rise—rise, and I must not keep him down. I must

make him think I don't care much for him, and can be quite happy without him. And I thought we should have George always !”

“ Wisht, lassie !” said old M'Callum ; “ the Lord gives and the Lord takes awa', and a' ye've to do, lassie, is to bless His holy name.”

“ And you have not lost George,” I pleaded. “ Even if he live with Miss Sanders, still he will be close to you, and he will not forget that you are his old friend—his first friend.”

And just then it struck me it was a good thing his relationship to the Sanderses had not been known on his arrival at Upper Mallowe, for though Bessie's heart was soft enough towards him now, when she saw him subdued, mellowed, and somewhat instructed, her charity was not as tender and catholic as Alice's, and she might have shrunk from the uncouth coarseness of the mere tramper boy.

“And he *is* George Roper’s son,” Alice exclaimed, suddenly, her tears ceasing, as she started up to set the supper dishes, “and it was his father’s knife he found in the hedge—and Bessie Sanders believes our Ewen guilty—and now——”

“But George does not,” I interrupted, “and George never will—and your brother’s innocence may be made manifest yet. This very evening gives us an instance how secret things are brought to light.”

I said no more, for I knew her woman’s heart was very sore—smarting with the old ache of her brother’s sufferings, and the newer pang of Mr. Weston’s love-affair. At another time she would rejoice in the joy of Bessie and George, but just now it mocked her,—as a laugh in the streets mocks the watcher by a dying bed.

So I returned home, musing at the wondrous providence which weaves together such varying threads of human life, and suddenly

the question forced itself upon my mind—
“Is it possible that he who led George
Wilmot to our house a year ago is the same
who now sends this letter?”

CHAPTER V.

A QUESTION ANSWERED.

THE weeks following that mysterious letter from London brought with them no interests stronger than the opening of the evening classes, and the preparations for our great Christmas gathering. We issued our invitations ten days beforehand, believing the expectation of pleasure to be its very essence, and then we tried our hardest to prove equal to the occasion. The village tradesfolk were gladdened by the liberality of Mr. Herbert's orders, and half the girls in the parish were pressed into his niece's service, to assist in the decoration of the chambers. Agnes worked valiantly: whenever we called we never found her post deserted. Some-

times her colour-box was open, and an illumination in progress; or else she was tying up posies, or stringing holly berries. Nay, a few mornings before the entertainment, when the freedom and easiness of hospitality had extended so far that I found the house-door open, and nobody about, I was guided to my hostess by the sound of singing in the dining-room. Her voice came ringing through the long corridor, and she sang a song of her father's; for I remembered the words, as I half-voluntarily paused to catch them:—

“There’s ane they dinna ken about,
For naebody kens him noo,
An’ he used to say—Oh I daurna tell!
But he meant it all for true.

“An’ if I ken I’m a blithesome lass,
Wi’ a winsome way or twa,
It isna for a’ the neebors’ talk,
But because he telt me sae.”

The song ceased when she heard my foot-step, and she turned towards me a face rosy

with the exertion of rubbing-up the oaken table. She was a pretty quaint figure, in her blue print dress, with the sleeves rolled back from her round wrists, and her hair pushed up on her broad, flushed brow. Nevertheless, knowing there were three servants in the house, I half-wondered to find her so employed. I think she caught my thought, and perhaps that accounted for a certain piqued, almost defiant, expression on her face.

“Playing the housewife, Miss Herbert?” I said.

“Good earnest play,” she answered, and resumed her cloth, and went gallantly on with her polishing.

“My dear,” I remarked presently, “I fear you will tire yourself.”

“So would the servant,” she replied, with a laugh. “And the less I do it, the sooner I shall tire. Have you never heard of the poor exiled woman who carried her calf every

day, while her strength increased with its weight, till at last she still carried it when it was a cow, Mr. Garrett?"

"I have heard the story," I answered, "and though I doubt its exact truth, yet its principle is quite correct. 'Strength according to our day' is a scriptural promise. And we none of us know what we can do until we begin to try."

"O, I think I could do anything if I had a very strong motive," she said.

"Anything?" I echoed. "That is a wide statement, my dear."

"I mean anything within reason," she replied: "any household work, or travelling, or matters of that kind. There's a pleasant excitement in exertion."

"But there is a reaction too," I said.

"Do you think so?" she queried, rather heedlessly, still rubbing away. "Now, when this table is finished," she added presently, "the sight of it will be quite a treat

to me, because I shall be proud of it. And yet, I daresay, the housemaid will laugh aside at my performance. But I think we enjoy things for their relation to ourselves, and not for their own perfection."

"I believe that is universally true," I answered.

"And so I think poor people enjoy more than rich ones," she went on. "I don't mean *very* poor people, but those who have to work hard, and to plan a great deal. What pleasure lies in buying a dress when you can afford any price, and can send it anywhere to be made up? But it is quite another thing when you have but a certain sum to spend, and must take a lively interest in getting the best and prettiest for that sum!"

"I should say, you have a talent for management, my dear," I observed.

"I think I have,"—with a bright glance as if in acceptance of a valued compliment,

then a little sigh,—“I’m almost sure I have.”

At this moment, a ruddy servant put her head into the room, saying, “Please, miss, Mrs. Irons says, she’s a beginning of the pastry,”—adding, in an apologetic aside, “you remember, you wanted to see it, miss.”

“Yes, Mary, and I’ll come,” returned the young lady. “But will you go over the house and find my uncle, and tell him that Mr. Garrett is here? And then you will kindly excuse me, sir,” she added, dropping one of her slight, half-courtly, half-quaint curtsies, as she left the room.

I remained in the house more than an hour, chatting with Mr. Herbert. Before my departure, he took me to his farmyard to see some rare fowls, which had just arrived from a London auction. Now the kitchen windows, wide and low, overlooked this farmyard, and though I kept my eyes as strictly

as possible, I was not upon my guard until I had caught a very distinct glimpse of a slender form in a blue print dress, with pretty bare arms plunged into the floury contents of a great brown tub.

I did not see Agnes Herbert again until the night of our gathering. We intended to be among the earliest arrivals, but there were many before us, and Agnes was duly at her uncle's side, playing her part as hostess, and looking as quiet and pale as if there were no such things as oak-tables and rolling-pins. Her part that evening was not altogether easy. It was necessary that each promoter of the entertainment should have a line of duty particularly his own. Mr. Herbert busied himself among the farming people, with all of whom he enjoyed an honest, kindly, despotic popularity. Ruth was, as usual, most at home among the young folk, and my powers were just equal to pleasing the very aged, and the little

children, who, God bless them! are easily pleased. And in all these departments we found able seconds in the rector, and Mr. M'Callum and his daughter. But there were still a few who held aloof, tasty spinsters, or genteel young married people of the trading or *employé* class, who were heard to remark, "How nice it was,—how charming to see all distinctions merged for one evening: how much good must follow any opportunity for the different orders of society coming together, and learning mutual respect," and who then immediately looked askant at the other guests, and sat down apart, or in forlorn little coteries, in which the only common feeling lay in the texture of dresses, or the whiteness of hands. Yet these people had to be conciliated,—their want of sympathy but recommended them for conciliation, and there was no one less likely to arouse their prejudices than Agnes Herbert. So to her charge they were committed.

She did not flinch, but I knew her soul shivered within her, as she moved from one chilly presence to another. At first her face was very white, and her courtesy appeared constrained, but gradually her courage seemed to rise in very scorn of her shallow, frivolous companions. And then they, who would steadily have resisted the sweet suing influences of her purest nature, were suddenly conquered by the outburst of her strength. And so she, who warmly received and rightly understood, would have sat aside happy, and unnoticeable, now chilled and defiant, stood forth the beauty and wit of the evening. Beauty and wit! they are terrible crowns for a woman's wearing! I almost think they are a crown of thorn!

But not all my interest in Agnes could exonerate me from my own duties. Indeed, while observing her I had somewhat flagged in my narration of the adventures of the famous little crookback of the "Arabian

Nights," wherewith I beguiled a large circle of toothless old ladies and open-mouthed children. That night I made a reputation as a story-teller. After the Crookback, I gave the Ugly Duckling. After the Ugly Duckling, I briefly narrated the story of Alexander Selkirk. I was encored, and I repeated my performances to increased audiences. I was applauded—yes, touchingly applauded—for one wee damsel of seven summers gave me a kiss, and said she loved me, oh, so much! Am I a weak old fellow to repeat this? Ah, but the little lips were soft, and the little face was—what Lucy's grandchild's might have been!

What a quiet peaceful world it seemed among those grandmothers and their darlings! Nobody can say what tragedies have stamped their lines on the worn old faces, but then their agony is over. They may have been weary, but their rest is nearly reached, and like travellers idly waiting at a station,

their minds are free and open to little amusements and trifling cares. And the children!—for them the fleecy snow is still a solemn and novel mystery, and morning and night, Saturday half-holiday, and Sunday service are variety enough, the dear little children, who hold life carelessly, like a toy with an unknown secret shut inside it. And after all, it is our own fault that we are not as light-hearted and content. They trust all to their parents. Cannot we trust God? Is it best to be in the outer court of the temple, or within the veil? When father and mother forsake us, does not God take us up?

Then my story, and the laughter of my hearers were hushed for the music. None of the working men or women dreamed of speaking while the young ladies were “at the piano.” But many of those who thought themselves far better born and bred, whispered, and flirted, and commented, as if the

sweet sounds were nothing but an accompaniment to their own shallow minds, a very good background to cover the gaps of their feeble wit! And yet, poor things, they all thought they had "a taste for music," and so I suppose they had, as much taste for that as for anything, since doubtless they would chatter in front of Raphaël's Transfiguration, and interrupt the reading of Wordsworth's "Immortality." For after all, taste is not emotion. Taste is the education of the senses, and the senses are part of that body which some day we shall throw away like a worn-out garment. But emotion is the stirring of the soul, like the angel's touch on the waters of Bethesda.

Agnes neither sang nor played. She could do both, but she did not. The general performances were very commonplace, by which I don't mean simple or well-known, but rather the contrary, mere musical gymnastics, clumsily performed. But Marian

Blake, the daughter of Mr. Marten's friend the lieutenant, sang a very sweet, touching Scotch ballad about a young laird going to the wars, who never, never came back, and how his lady-love sat with his mother and sisters, and loved them for his sake, and would not despair of his return till her heart was comforted by very patience, and heaven was nearer than earth. Mr. M'Callum told me, "he minded his mother sang it when he was a bit bairnie, but it was ane of thae sangs which were aye fresh, like God's ain blessed flowers." Like such songs, and like such flowers, is Marian Blake herself. And Mr. Marten stood beside her while she sang, and smiled upon her when the song was over. And it seemed as if a breeze from Eden blew through the crowded room.

But it was not Eden. For glancing from the pretty playful group around the piano, my eyes fell on Alice M'Callum, resting from

her hospitable labours, and self-surrendered to the spells of sweet sad music, and her face was so unutterably sorrowful that it startled one, like the discovery of a grave in a garden. Whenever the door opened she looked towards it, not expectantly, but yet with a light in her eyes which hopelessly darkened as each tardy arrival proved—not whom she longed for. As I watched her, I could have said bitter words of young Weston. For among our other friends we had sent him an invitation, and he had not even answered it. I had hoped his silence arose from a reluctance finally to decline it. But his absence seemed to indicate another cause. I felt my anger towards him was very illogical, for he had been refused by the woman whom he had honoured, and so he had a right to turn utterly away from her. But I pleaded testily with myself, “Genuine love has no rights. He knows why she refused him, and he is a coward to give her

up," and then I half smiled to think how Alice's wan face would fire with indignation if she knew what hard names I silently bestowed upon him.

Supper came at last. The long tables fairly groaned under the substantial dainties provided by our liberal host, and the parents were obliged to chide their youngsters for too eager exclamations of "Look at the puddin'!" and "O the jolly pies!" Of course such cries must be reprov'd, but nevertheless one likes the frank British boy, who is not above making them. Then there was a fine tangle before each got into his place at table, but it was accomplished at last, and I found Mr. Marten had seated Miss Blake at my right hand, and I was very much obliged to him for so pleasant a companion. Ruth was placed opposite Mr. Herbert, and George Wilmot slipped into an empty place beside Alice M'Callum, and when she whispered something to him which

made him glance towards his cousin Bessie, I was glad to see that Bessie answered the glance with a smile and nod, which set the boy's conscience at ease about deserting her. After her first hungry joy over a new guest to her empty heart, Miss Sanders's magnanimity had re-asserted itself, and she never grudged her kinsman's love for his old friends.

It was a very merry meal. There was a great deal of talk, and to judge by the laughter, there were some good jokes uttered, perhaps no worse because not original. Even the genteel people grew convivial, and contributed their mites to the general entertainment, warming so far as to tell some tolerably good stories, none the less amusing for such prefaces as "On my uncle's estate in Shropshire," or "While my cousin was Canon of Close Cathedral," about which one need not be over-severe, for doubtless the vanity pleased them-

selves, and I'm sure it did not hurt any one else.

But when supper was nearly over, and many plates were pushed a little away, and the bustle of helping and serving was quite done, a light thin voice spoke up from the far end of the table. There was an instant hush, as there always is in mixed companies when a woman makes an audible appeal. It was the village chemist's bran-new wife, a flaxen, frivolous London girl. And this was what she asked :—

“ Mr. Herbert, I am so fond of romances that you must tell me the history of that mysterious picture with its back to us. I'm sure it has a history. Is it the portrait of some naughty ancestor?”

There was a silence—a silence to be felt — the breathlessness of expectant people. My own eyes seemed rooted to the table before me. Suddenly another voice broke the spell—it seemed a strange

voice with just a familiar note, and it said—

“The picture is only a portrait—not a good one—of my cousin—my cousin Ralph.”

It was Agnes who spoke. As I looked towards her, there was a bright spot on her cheek, but it faded instantly. Mrs. Irons had walked up the room from her station at the door, and now stood behind her young lady's chair. By this time, the faces round the table showed the foolish inquirer that she had trodden on dangerous ground, and with the blundering tactics of a weak mind, she proceeded to a stammering apology, far worse than her offence.

“I'm sure I didn't know I shouldn't ask. I thought it was something dead and gone. I'd no idea there was anything unpleasant now——”

“Nobody says there is,” returned Agnes, with the awful dignity of a quiet nature

aroused, and so saying, she rose from her seat, thereby setting us an example to do the same, and thus put an end to an embarrassing situation.

It was fortunate for the success of our gathering, that this unhappy incident occurred at its very close, for it would have put a check to all geniality. Some pitied the rebuked questioner, but the majority felt for the family thus forced to display its skeleton, of whose existence nearly everybody seemed quite aware. Anyhow, a chill had fallen on the whole party. No tone rose above a whisper, and with a sense of relief I heard Mr. Marten announce that we would separate after singing the ever-beautiful and always appropriate Evening Hymn.

And I went home, feeling I had an answer to my old riddle, "Who are 'we?'"

CHAPTER VI.

A HOUSEHOLD SKELETON.

THE next morning rose dank and chilly. I got up with that strange sensation of dreamy unreality which often follows unusual exertion or excitement. The landscape from my chamber window was not cheering. A heavy rain had fallen in the night, and the panes were dabbled with drops from creepers around, while beyond lay field below field, all in the heavy, dull green which characterizes winter moisture. To-morrow was Christmas-day, and all my little seasonable remembrances lay in the hall below ready for despatch, but somehow the seasonable feeling was not in my heart, which felt as cold and dank as the meadows outside.

But I cheered a little when I entered our snug parlour, where Ruth was already seated, with a knitted crimson shawl enlivening her black dress, and the great Bible before her on a corner of the breakfast table. It was a curious fact, that during our walk homeward the night before we had not even mentioned the incident of the picture. Such is the strange reticence which sometimes seizes one regarding any subject of which his mind is particularly full.

But I could tell by my sister's very movement that she now intended to break this silence. And, sure enough, as she handed me my first cup of tea, she said—

“Depend upon it, Edward, Ralph Herbert is Ewen's Mr. Ralph.”

“I don't doubt it,” I answered; “but how strange it is that through all our intimacy with the Great Farm, we have heard no allusion to this missing member of its household! And yet I remember Mr.

Marten once made some slight remark about 'young Mr. Herbert,' but I afterwards supposed I had misunderstood him, and since then I had forgotten all about it. Do you think Mr. Herbert was angry with Agnes for her frankness last night?" I inquired, after a pause.

"He was half angry and half surprised," replied my sister. "He liked her dash of the Herbert spirit. You know we all like to recognise our own streak of the old Adam in another. And, after all, since he chooses to keep the thing there, to provoke questions, I don't see how she could have acted better than she did."

I had my own thoughts on the subject. I remembered the conversation of that afternoon, when Agnes Herbert had joined Ewen and me in the fields behind the Low Meadow, and I doubted whether the young lady had answered for her uncle, with a wish to preserve as much propriety as possible, or

rather with a woman's desperate resolution to speak up for the absent, who could not defend himself. I remembered the letter with which Ewen had been entrusted for a friend in London, whose address she did not exactly know. I even remembered more than this—something which I banished from my mind as soon as it entered it, for, as I always say (as I once said to Alice M'Callum), coincidences are but fancies till proved by facts, and facts once obtained, coincidences are no longer anything.

“But what must this Ralph be?” I remarked, “for his very picture to be thus disgraced in his own father's house?”

“He needn't be so very bad because of that,” returned Ruth; “some parents choose to stamp children as prodigals whom others would think angels. Before you condemn the black sheep of a family, you must make sure that the shepherd is not colour-blind.”

We did not prolong the conversation. We

had nothing new to say, and we should only have gone over the old ground, making wild guesses as to possibilities and probabilities. Besides, it was Christmas-time, and therefore my housewifely sister was more than usually busy, and during the whole day the parlour was only honoured by her presence at intervals few and far between. I was dull and lonely enough. The Christmas annuals were in the house, but I could not read, for there was a story being acted out, only a few yards off, which absorbed all my interest. I should have been glad of a visitor, but none came. I knew perfectly well that none were likely to come. Ewen would be at the Refuge that evening, but he would only arrive by a late train. And, as Christmas-day fell on a Friday, I concluded he would remain at home till the Monday following, and so I could not expect to see him, except at church, until Saturday or Sunday; and I knew, too, that Mr. Marten was busy—for

was there not a sermon to be preached to-morrow? and also duties to be done beforehand to provide for a blank day, for had he not told me he was again to spend Christmas with the Blakes? Oh, the Blakes, indeed! Ah, the Blakes, to be sure!

But a visitor came at last; only, with the usual contrariness of visitors, not till I had ceased wishing for one, for my lonely hours wore wearily away, until evening brought my sister back to her accustomed seat, when it became my pleasing duty to read her extracts from the seasonable literature, and to enlighten her with my sensible criticisms thereon. And we were in the height of an edifying discussion about the naturalness and propriety of a certain hero's mode of courting a certain heroine, when there came a vigorous pull at our door-bell, and then there was a pause in our dialogue till Phillis came to us, announcing, "It's Mrs. Irons from the Great Farm, ma'am, and she says

she wants to speak to you about a message from her master."

"Then show her in here," rejoined my sister.

Mrs. Irons obeyed the summons with the noisy sound of thick sensible boots. She only came a step or two into the room, and then stood still. I have said she was a big gaunt woman, and she wore a clinging sage-green dress and a large-patterned shawl, with a worn boa tied round her neck, and half hidden behind limp black satin bonnet-strings. When Phillis set a chair for her, she promptly took it, and forthwith pulled off her cotton gloves and loosened her boa, in consideration of the near neighbourhood of our blazing fire. But after her first tart "good evening," her mouth remained shut as closely as a steel trap.

"I wonder Mr. Herbert can spare you from the Farm this evening," said Ruth, by way of opening the conversation.

“ Ah,” rejoined our visitor, “ but there be some things that even meat and drink must bide for—not but what the puddin’s ready, and the mince-pies made, and only the fowls a-picking, and the girls *are* fools if they can’t do that between them !”

“ I hope Mr. Herbert and his niece are quite well ?” I inquired.

“ Yes, they’re quite well, sir,” she returned, “ for that’s the answer they’d give ye themselves. But it don’t become Sarah Irons to beat about her master’s bush. Only, ma’am,” she added, turning to my sister, “ I hopes you’ll consider what a servant’s told to say, she must say, but them ain’t always her own words.”

“ Every one understands that,” answered Ruth.

“ Yes,” said Mrs. Irons, “ I think even master does. For he says, ‘ You tell them what I say, Sarah ;’ but, says he, ‘ you can give your own version of all theins and outs.’ ”

“And what did Mr. Herbert say?” asked my sister.

“He said, ma’am,” resumed Mrs. Irons, solemnly, “‘Will you ask Miss Garrett to help me to keep a young girl from a-sacrificing of herself to a vagabond?’ Now, I knows the master often uses stronger language than he means, mem ; so, says I, ‘Vagabond, sir?’ But he only says, cross-like, ‘Yes, Sarah, vagabond, or anything worse that you can think of.’”

“And who is the young girl, and who is the vagabond, Sarah?” asked Ruth, gravely enough, though I thought I could detect a budding smile.

“The young girl is our Miss Agnes,” answered the worthy woman; “and, lack-a-day! by that hard name the master means his own son, young Mr. Ralph.”

There was a silence.

“The master reckons you know about him?” she said presently, in a questioning

tone, "because Miss Agnes has often been here. But I reckon's you don't, for she's not one to talk much where she feels most."

"She never named him," answered Ruth.

"Well, ma'am," returned Mrs. Irons, her tongue evidently unlocked, "it's a long story. It began long before Master Ralph was born or thought of—bless me, more than ten years before. It had begun when I first entered the Great Farm, in the old lady's days. Not that she'd be a very old woman if she were alive now; but when young ones come on, those behind 'em are always called old. A fine woman she was, too, and had been a beauty, and was a real lady to the last, with hands too white to touch a rough thing."

"Never mind that," said Ruth, rather testily; "it can't have much to do with the present time."

"Yes, it do, ma'am," answered Mrs. Irons, a little affronted, "for she was that high and

delicate in her mind, that she could not abide anything but the finest; and when I first saw her, she was mighty angry with her youngest son, because he wouldn't be a parson, but ran off to London, and took to scribbling for his daily bread. You see, the patron of St. Cross would always give it to a Herbert, if there was one ready. And Madam Herbert would never see her boy again, though he were her favourite before, being softer mannered than the master. She wouldn't let him come to her dying bed, and she left behind her a written paper, forbidding the master to give his brother stick or stone that had belonged to her. You know, mem, it was very hard for her to see a stranger put over the village where her son might ha' been, and the Herberts have never been so well looked on since. And she was a real lady, who could stick to her dignity."

Mrs. Irons paused, but Ruth gave no encouraging sympathy, though she would not

openly check the ugly, honest woman's sincere though mistaken admiration for the false, vain beauty who had once been Laura Carewe. Then Mrs. Irons resumed :

“When Madam was dead, master got married to quite another sort of lady. At first I wondered how he could bear to see her sitting in his mother's place, for she was a little quiet thing, nothing to see, and nothing to hear ; but he was marvellous set on her. And by-and-by I liked her too, as she grew at home in her own house. But, bless her! she was only there a year. For when Master Ralph came she was took away the very next day. She seemed to get over it all right, and was glad it was a boy—and a fine boy he was too—the finest baby I ever saw. And the master was so proud, and went about on tip-toe a-hushing of us all. But the second day the young mistress called me to her, and she a-lying on her bed, like a tired angel a-resting on the

clouds. And she says, 'Take him, please' (that was the dear baby); 'I can't have him any longer. You must take care of him for me, Sarah.' And then she just lifted up her head, and kissed him as I took him away. And half-an-hour later she was gone." And the hard voice failed, and the pale, grey eyes were dim with tears for the young mother who had been in her grave more than five-and-twenty years.

"The master was dreadfully cut up," she went on presently, "and after a bit he took to the babby almost like a woman, and would sit in the dining-room the whole evening a nursin' and playing with it; and there was a rare work if anything ailed the child, which wasn't often, for he was a fine little fellow, and did not seem to fret after his mother. But when he growed up, and could walk about and talk, the master had that determined spirit that he'd make himself be ever so stern with the boy for fear

he'd spoil him. And stern enough he were, though perhaps no more than was good, if there'd been a mother to put it all straight again. But there was only me to take the child's part, and I was nobody. However, in the course of time, things righted themselves, and the lad never said his father nay, and there were no words atween them. And when he came of age, if you had asked the old rector—the one afore Mr. Marten—for a model of the fifth commandment, he'd have pointed out our Mr. Herbert and Master Ralph. Of course, the young master had plenty of time to himself, and he and his father did not see much of each other except at meals and late o' nights. And soon after the coming o' age, Mr. Herbert's brother sent down word he were dying in London."

"Agnes' father?" queried Ruth.

"Yes," resumed Mrs. Irons; "master showed me his letter—master isn't the man

to misdoubt a woman who has lived in his house thirty years! A rare, fine letter it was, sayin' he would never have reminded the Herberts of himself, but he was leaving a daughter who wouldn't disgrace any kindness they might show her. Master and me started for London that very night, but it was all over before we got there. And there was the old Madam's son a-layin' dead in two bits o' rooms, in a street off Soho Square, in a house so packed up with lodgers that there was always one or other creeping about on the staircase,—him who might have been rector of St. Cross and had half the parish at his funeral! And there was Miss Agnes, stinting her tears that she might stitch her 'broidery to pay for the supper she set before us. But the master snatched it out of her hands, and told her that was done with for ever. And directly after the funeral, he took her home with us to the Great Farm, and somehow—mayhap, because nobody'd

ever looked so at me,—the minute she and Mister Ralph met, I thought how it would be, and I wondered if it was joy or rue the master was planting in his house that night. Mister Ralph was at home a good deal more after that, and in the fine weather he and his cousin were much out together. She was fond of drawing, for she'd learnt it somehow in London, and was over-glad to practice it in the country; and the young master himself had always a turn that way. I mind they had a tiff once, because he was out two or three hours every evening, and wouldn't tell her where he went, till at last he brought home a fine drawing, and told her how he had been to a class at Mallowe, and what praises he got from some artists who'd been a-visiting the teacher. And she was so pleased, that before he could stop her, she ran off to tell the master, thinking no harm, poor dear! And then there was a fine piece o' work; and that was the beginning of the

strife. For it set the master a-thinking of his brother's folly; and he said the Herberts should have nothing to do with scratching or scrawling 'cept to pay for 'em, if they wanted 'em. But it was hushed up for that time; and very soon after, I saw Mr. Ralph's mother's keeper-ring on his cousin's hand—and Sarah Irons is not so thick in the head but she knowed what that meant—and the master seemed mighty satisfied, and fonder nor ever of his niece."

"She wears that ring still," I observed.

"She do, and she'll wear it in her coffin," returned Mrs. Irons: "and I say, 'God bless her!'—though it were no great fancy I took for her at fust, with her face over white and worn for a young thing, and I even thought Mr. Ralph might ha' found a better missis for the Great Farm; but I did not guess how it would be, and he knowed best, after all!"

"And what happened to bring all this

household happiness to an end?" I asked.

"The young master would not turn into his father's mould," answered the good woman, with a sad shake of her head. "He could not take to the farm, but wanted to go to London and be an artist, which his father would not hear on. And Mr. Herbert said hard things of daubers and such like, and, lack-a-day! Master Ralph had an answer ready about bumpkins and clod-hoppers; and 'atween the two, Miss Agnes was always scared and striving, and I used to catch her crying, because the young master got to shun his home, and almost seemed careless of her. And other times she were quite cheerful because she thought things were mending. But it came to an end on New-Year's day, three years a-gone. Miss Agnes were in the kitchen with me, when master and his son came in, and we heard high words atween 'em, and master shut the

dining-room door with a bang ; and I would not let Miss Agnes go in, because I thought they'd settle it best themselves. And all of a sudden Master Ralph came out, and came to the kitchen and caught hold of his cousin and kissed her hard and fast, and never seemed to see me, and then walked straight out at the door ; and while we both stood struck, a-starin at each other, there was the master calling us in a voice fit to raise the dead.

“ He was standing by the fire-place in the dining-room, and there was a chair upset on the ground. Master's face was white, and I'd never seen his face white afore,—for, in ordinary, he turns red in his passions,—and he put dreadful words on Master Ralph, and said the old Herberts of Mallowe had come to an end. And then he noticed his son's picture on the wall, and he up and struck it in the face, and turned it round to the wall—never stopping to lift it from the

nail, and you may see the hanging-string is twisted to this day. And then he caught his niece's hand, and was drawing off her ring—the very ring he had once put on his wife's finger—but she snatched her hand away, and for a minute she seemed the strongest of the two, and her voice was as loud and shriller! But the next minute, she was down on the floor at his feet, a-begging of him like a little chidden child. She'd kept her own, and that was all she cared about; and master never said another word about the ring."

Mrs. Irons paused for a moment.

"He was calmer-like after that," she went on, "but he told us we were never to set it any more that he and Master Ralph were father and son. 'Sarah,' says he, 'there's nothing in this house for him—not even room to stand on the door-mat. Mind, your master says so, whom you've served faithful this thirty years!' I don't know how it was,—

whether it was a feeling for the only baby I'd ever nursed, or the sight of poor Miss Agnes—but says I, 'Yes, sir; I'll mind, except so far as I can't disobey my dead missis' orders to take care of her boy for her. The words of the dead last long, sir,' I said, 'for there's no asking 'em to draw 'em back.'

“And then, somehow, we went off to our own rooms, for the night; but I left the door on the latch if so be the young master might come back, and things straighten in the morning. But sure enough, I heard the master go and fasten it up with his own hands. And in the dead of the night, just as I was dropping asleep, a-dreaming that Master Ralph was a baby in my arms, Miss Agnes came and roused me like a spectre. It was on her mind that her cousin might destroy himself, and we be never the wiser; and so to quiet her, I had to promise that first thing in the morning

I'd go out and ask about him. But when I was out a-trailing about the village, I didn't know where to go, nor who to ask. I thought the lad had likely taken the last train to London, and it struck me that the new rector—I mean Mr. Marten—who had just come from there, might put me in the way to track him. So I went and told him just as much as I must, and as little as I could. And then I wondered I hadn't had common sense to do what he did—to go to the railway station, and ask if young Herbert had left there by the London train. And the guard said he had. And then Mr. Marten did more than I bargained for. He called at the Great Farm, and had a long talk with the master. I thought the place would be too hot to hold me after that. But the master never said one word about what I'd done. And the rector never called again—never till that evening when he came with you, sir."

“And did Mr. Ralph make no effort to communicate with his cousin?” I asked.

“O yes, indeed,” she replied. “The morning of the second day there came a letter telling her where he was, and full of fine hopes of his future, and sure that his father had done the best thing for him when he turned him out of the Great Farm, and so on. Miss Agnes never named the letter to her uncle, but she let it lie on the dining-room mantel for two whole days, and he looked at the envelope, but said ne’er a word. And be sure, she answered it by the first post. And so things went on for a time.”

“And did you never hear what was the quarrel between father and son?” inquired Ruth.

“Mr. Ralph wrote that it was about difficulties he was in at Mallowe—money difficulties, and that his father would not help him unless he promised to give himself

up to the farm, which he wouldn't, and then the master washed his hands of him. I'm feared he been rather reckless that time when he was a'most driven out of his own home. But he wrote he should soon work it all off, and would be wise in future."

"And when did this state of things end?" I queried.

"Well, six months after he left home, in the middle of summer, he wrote word he expected he should be at Malloze in the course of a few days, and if so, and he could send a message when he arrived, would his cousin ask me to come with her to meet him, so that they might have a little walk and talk together—the two poor dears! And he wrote his letter, which she showed me, so simple and straightforward, that I thought he was surely in the right way, and I should be obeying his dead mother if I helped him to this bit of comfort to encourage him on. And then Miss Agnes and me were in

a regular flutter at every knock that came to the door.”

With all her earnestness, worthy Mrs. Irons had a bit of the art of a story teller, for she paused at every climax.

“ And did you see him at last ? ” I asked, to prompt her.

“ He never comed, ” she answered, and there was no letter from him long over his usual time, and I thought Miss Agnes would waste away to nothing, and her soul would get free to go and watch over him wherever he was. At last there was a letter, for me, not for her. It said he'd been in France and very ill, and I was to tell his cousin she was to forget she had ever seen him, for she should never see him again ; he was not fit to come within her sight ; he wasn't fit to write to herself, but I was to give her that letter to do what she liked with, though it was written to me. I thought that seemed as if he half hoped she'd still care to have

it. But it had no address, and his poor writing was so bad! And in a postscript he said she was to take off her engaged ring, and to give it back to his father, and to love and honour him always, and in everything, for whatever the master had cost him, he had only saved her from misery, and now she was all that he had in the world.

“I shan’t ever forget her face, when she read it,” Mrs. Irons went on. “I watched her, for I was feared. But there came a sort of glory on her, and she looked up with a light in her eyes, and said, ‘I will never do it, Sarah. Now for the first and last time, I disobey him. I will never take off his ring, and I will never give him up! And I will love and honour my uncle always and in everything, just for his sake—Ralph first, and he next.’ And all that day she bore up better than I did.”

“Ah,” murmured my sister, “there is a comfort in the strength of love.”

“I dare say there is, ma’am,” answered the honest woman, “but if so be it’s a comfort that doesn’t warm the heart enough to cheer the body, and it was woeful to see how Miss Agnes wore away, and how she’d stand at the window a-watching for the post that never brought her nought. She’d been a lively sponisible girl before, always at her books, or her pencil, or her needles, and I think she tried to keep on with them, but there were nothing to force her, and she couldn’t force herself. And it seemed weary work for a young thing to sit waiting and waiting, like old folks wait for death. I often thought it might be a good thing for her to be back in London, a-earnin’ of her own living.”

“And what was the next you heard of young Mr. Herbert?” I inquired.

“Nought for more than a year,” she returned. “Winter had come round again, and it was nigh Christmas, when, one night,

quite late, I heard a tapping at the little window beside the back-door. Miss Agnes were a-bed, but it came over me who it was, and I went out quite softly, not to waken the master, nor nobody. And it were Master Ralph, sure enough; but he would not cross his father's threshold, and I had to talk to him in the yard. He'd been to Mallowe, he said, a-tryin to get some money he had lent long ago to a young fellow there, but he couldn't; and would you believe it, sir, the master's only son was that hard driven, that he hadn't a penny to take him back to London; and he spoke so weakly and looked so white, that I asked a straightforward question, and he owned to old Sarah, who fed him when he was a baby, that he had not touched aught since a cup of tea in the early morning. He said he was sure he could not eat anything if he had it, but I knowed what that meant; and I just made him go and sit down in my washhouse, and

then carried him some sandwiches, and a cup of wine. It wasn't my master's victuals I gave," explained the faithful creature, "for the wine I'd bought with my own money to give some to a poor consumptive creature in the village; and I put two shillings into the purse my master gives me for house expenses, which were over and above the value of the bread and meat I took. Master Ralph would scarce touch it at first; but once he began, he eat like a famished dog. And it seemed to call him back to life and feeling, like; for before he took it, he'd spoken as cold and dry as if it was nothing, his coming so to his own father's house, but when he'd done, all of a sudden, he put his arm round my neck, and dropped his face on my shoulder, and cried as he scarcely ever did, even when he was a child. I felt the hot tears a-falling fast on my hand. I hope you'll excuse my being so affected, ma'am," said the worthy woman, wiping tears from

her hard-lined cheeks, “ but I’ve had nobody of my own since I was twenty years old, and I’d had him from his dying mother ; and he seemed to belong to me more than any one else. And when he was a little bit quieted he told me he had been in the neighbourhood once or twice afore, about this same little debt, and he’d walked round and round the Great Farm, but hadn’t ventured to come nigh it, and he’d only come at last, to ask me for enough to take him back to London ; for come what might, he did not want to starve in his native place. And I made him take all the money I had in my workbox, and a rare bother I had to make him take it. Though he knowed I had not lived thirty years in service for nothing, still he wouldn’t touch it till I said he might pay me directly he could, and with interest too, if he liked. And all the time he kept asking about his cousin, and made me promise not to tell her of seeing him in such trouble

—at least, not directly; and ‘I hope she forgets me,’ he said, poor dear, and looked so down-hearted, that the truth came out afore I knowed it; and said I, ‘Don’t you think it; she’s as true to you as if you’d never parted, and she always will be; and you’ll live to talk it over some day, sir,’ I said. But he shook his head, and said no, that wouldn’t ever be; and he was sorry he’d crossed her life to darken it. But I told him it was all settled in the will of God; and, says I, ‘Even if you never come together, the young missus will not be an unhappy woman, if she knows you’re comfortable and settled in yourself. If you’d keep trouble from her, keep it from yourself, sir,’ I said. And then he went away.”

“And did you never tell Miss Herbert of this visit?” I inquired.

“Not till quite lately,” she answered. “About June I got a post-office ‘order for the money I’d lent Mr. Ralph, but even

then I only told her I'd reasons of my own for saying her cousin was alive and well. And in the autumn, when young M'Callum came down to London for his holiday, Miss Agnes found out the two were living together in London. And Mr. Ralph has written to her since then, and she has put his letters on the dining-room mantel, just as she did at first. She has told me he is doing pretty well, and she's not said a word further. But master and me, we've eyes in our heads, and we can put two and two together, and didn't she set-to, and get ready that book of her father's, and sell it? And hasn't she taken a mighty interest in the cooking and the housework? And doesn't she try how little she can spend on her dress? And isn't she reading a book about Canada? And after the way she spoke up for Mr. Ralph last night, the whole village'll talk. Master knows as well as I do that there's something in the wind, and

so he sends me here to ask you to help him to stop it."

"And you don't come quite willingly, Mrs. Irons?" queried Ruth.

"Well, I don't, ma'am," she answered, candidly; "and I'd come less willingly if I thought you or the master either would be able to stop it."

"You think of the young man," I said, "but we must give some consideration to the prospect before Miss Herbert."

"I don't see why the two need be thought on apart," returned Mrs. Irons, her native asperity again rising to the surface. "There's a lot of fine talk about female influence and out-of-the-way things, but all I say is, If God puts a man's soul in reach of a woman's hand, and she throws it away, it may go to the wicked place, but she's scarcely fit to go to t'other one! Yes, you may all say what you like!" she added, standing up, and shaking out her skirt, with a disclaim-

ing gesture; "but if any of you change Miss Agnes' mind, then God help Master Ralph, and I've made a mistake all along!"

"Whether she be right or wrong in this matter," said Ruth, after our visitor had departed, "she is a good woman."

"I should say there is a fortune of insufficiently-claimed affection lying waste in her heart," I remarked.

"No matter," answered my sister, "it will ascend pure to God!"

CHAPTER VII.

EWEN.

CHRISTMAS-DAY again ; not an honest Christmas, like the last, with frozen ground and peeps of pale sunshine. But Christmas in a wet green robe with an umbrella. The choir boys came under our window, as before, but Ruth despatched them after one short hymn ; “it was not worth while for them to stand there getting wet,” she said. Nevertheless we managed to attend service, and despite the unfavourable weather, St. Cross had had a good congregation.

Mr. Herbert stole a glance at us as he entered his pew. His niece followed him, quite unconscious of the revelation of the preceding night. Then I looked towards

the M'Callums' accustomed seat—the old man and his two grandchildren were there, and I noticed that George Wilmot and his aunt sat with them, and then I remembered hearing they intended to spend Christmas together. Bessie Sanders was surely a true-hearted woman, for if she had yet any lingering doubt of Ewen, she certainly did not allow it to bias her actions. The worried look has left her face, and it is a finely-cut, powerful countenance, a quaint contrast to the round, ruddy visage of her nephew, with his clear, simple blue eyes. I have good hopes of that boy, and I think he will atone to his aunt for all the past.—“At eventide there shall be light.”

When the joyful service was over, and I turned to leave our pew, I saw at the back of the church one whose presence made me greatly glad. It was Mr. Weston, looking older and graver than he looked before. He waited for the M'Callums. In the

porch I saw he was introduced to Ewen. They all walked down the churchyard together, and there I lost sight of them, for the Herberts arrested our progress down the aisle, and we had their company for our homeward journey. What a strange significance did their conversation acquire from that revealed secret! And yet after all the significance may exist rather in the fancy of the hearer than in the mind of the speaker.

In the road we overtook the M'Callums and their friends walking in a kind of cluster, as one can in the country, whenever it would be rather invidious to get into couples. We all exchanged salutations. I had forgotten to ask Mrs. Irons if she supposed her master knew of the friendship between his son and Ewen. Anyhow, Mr. Herbert was as genial as ever towards both grandfather and grandson. Perhaps he argued with himself that it was no business of his if they

chose to befriend fools and beggars. But to Alice he was decidedly civil, and very interesting and pretty she looked in a demure, plaintive little flutter caused by the presence of her rejected suitor, who, for his part, soon dashed into a bucolic argument with his brother agriculturist of the Great Farm. Ewen alone walked a little apart, as if there was something in his lot which as yet he could scarcely cast into the simple merriment around him. I saw Agnes steal one or two glances at him, but he did not seem to notice her, though I almost fancied his pale cheek—it was very pale—reddened a little. At the end of the lane, our party broke into three groups, breathing good-byes and good wishes as if there was nothing in the world beyond a walk from church to Christmas cheer—no old tragedies, no hopes more wearing than fear, no endurance, no dead or jarring notes in the anthem of life. And then Ruth and I went home together.

We had our quiet dinner, she at one end of the table and I at the other, and then we drew up our chairs in front of the fire, and talked softly of all that had happened in the year—of the Refuge, and the Orphanage, and the May-day feast, and the hospital; of the M'Callums and their fortunes, and the trial of Agnes Herbert. And our talk was broken by short silences, when each gazed mutely at the red embers in the grate, and saw diverse things therein—perchance trees meet for whispering beneath, or the form of a woman-angel, or haply the turret of the old clock-house of Mallowe, or a rough pauper's grave. Shall I ever speak of these things to my sister? No, I think not—not in this world.

We had finished our tea, and were again lost in silence, when there came a gentle double rap at the front door. It was actually Ewen M'Callum.

He took a chair between us, and explained

that he intended to return to London by the first train next day, and so ventured to pay us this unexpected Christmas visit.

“How did they spare you from the Refuge?” asked Ruth.

“Oh, they’re all very merry there,” he answered, with a grave smile. “You know they have Mrs. Sanders and George, and Mr. Weston has stayed also. They’ll not miss me.”

“Need you return to London so soon?” I inquired.

“It is best for many reasons,” he replied.

“And how is Mr. Ralph?” I queried. “Ewen, we know his other name now.”

“You do?” he said quickly. “Mr. Ralph is very well, sir.”

“Why did you keep him a secret from us?” I asked.

“He wished to be kept secret from every one,” Ewen answered, gravely. “And I

kept the secret until I was forced to betray him to his cousin.”

“How forced?” inquired Ruth.

“Mr. Garrett asked about ‘Mr. Ralph’ in Miss Herbert’s hearing,” he replied; “that gave me an excuse. And I was very glad of it, for Ralph kept losing all hope and interest in life, and thinking he might throw himself away anyhow, like a useless thing.”

“Do you think he has great affection for his cousin?” I asked, in my prim, old-fashioned way.

Ewen turned to me with glowing eyes. “I should think he has!” he said. “It’s just her memory which has kept him afloat above the lowest depths. It’s just her memory that’s kept in him a bit of faith in man or God; and yet it was just her memory—thinking that he’d lost her—that made him stand where I found him last spring—on London Bridge, looking over and wondering if——”

There Ewen paused.

“His love should have given him courage to live worthily of her, come what might,” said Ruth.

“One would think so,” observed the young man, reflectively; “he should not have lost heart so soon; but it must have been a dreadful trial. It’s hard enough to love her—I mean it’s hard enough to love such as her—hopelessly from the beginning; but to have hope in one’s love at first and then to lose it, oh, we can’t guess how bitter that must be.”

“That’s right,” remarked Ruth; “when we measure our own temptations against our neighbour’s, let us always think his the sharpest.”

“But Ralph Herbert voluntarily resigned his cousin?” I said.

“He thought it was his bounden duty under certain circumstances. He still thinks so,” Ewen added.

“Then he still despairs?” queried Ruth, a little satirically.

The ghost of a smile crept over our visitor’s face, and that was his only answer.

“And so Mr. Ralph meditated a leap into the river,” continued my sister in her pitiless tones, “and he thought that was dying of love, while it would be simply death by feverish impatience and a cold bath.”

“Shakspeare says something like that, my dear,” I observed.

“Yes, I know he does,” returned Ruth, “and I daresay he says something like any remark *you* make, if it happen to be worth hearing. I always grow ill-tempered over any of this Lord Byron kind of romance. If I knew any one dying of love, and enjoying the sensation, I’d give them a good dose of physic, or a sound caning. Or if they were really such fools as to be slipping away without knowing it, I’d cheat them

into learning a language, or a good tough science.”

“Like Wordsworth’s gentleman who collected and dried flowers,” I remarked.

“But Ralph never thought he was dying of love,” said Ewen; “he was only broken down by misery.”

“By the way, you look much better than you did the last time you were here,” observed my sister, rather abruptly, disregarding Ewen’s last remark and turning towards him.

“I am much better, thank you,” he said.

“Then you knew you were ill?” pursued Ruth. “Alice was quite alarmed about you.”

“I never said a word to her,” he answered.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Where was the good?” said he; “she would have wanted me to give up my work, and my drawing, and so forth.”

“And why should you not?” I queried.

“Because I suppose it is a sin willingly to do aught to shorten one’s life,” he answered, with a quiet smile; “and if once I called myself sick, I should die.”

“Did you have any medical advice?” I inquired.

“Ralph made me go to a doctor,” he replied. “He said if I wouldn’t he would write and tell them at home; so I went once, though I don’t much believe in doctors, and I heard what was the matter with me, which I knew beforehand, and I was told to do certain things which I could not do, or I shouldn’t have been ill. But I did my best towards them, as I had done all the time, and in due time I recovered, as I felt I should from the first.”

“Ah,” said Ruth, “it takes much to kill young folks, or nobody would reach thirty.”

“But they grow old folks in the struggle!” remarked Ewen.

I thought he gave a little sigh, and I glanced towards him. The look of pain—of forced endurance—was gone; but it had taken its bloom with it, and had left its own traces behind. There were lines now which gave a noble character to the always handsome face: lines, which his future wife will declare are half his beauty, though she may give a little sigh to think she did not know him before they came! For I hope Ewen will have a wife some day, though I fancy he does not hope anything of that sort just now. And perhaps he will carry those lines with him when he goes to the Better Place. For we must not measure heavenly beauty by earthly beauty. Is it not a face “more marred than any man’s” which gazes at us from the glory of the Father’s throne?

“And if they do ‘grow old’ in the process,” I answered, repeating his words—for there had been a pause—“it is none the

worse. It is not the boys and girls who do the work of the world. They may be its flowers, but the middle-aged and elderly are its fruit and its corn."

"Young folks are often over-willing to die," remarked Ruth, folding her hands and gazing into the fire, "and God seldom wants us when we want death. He knows we don't want to go to Him, but only to get away from the world. And we're not fit to go to Him till we're quite willing to bide his time."

And then Ewen said "Good-bye!" and went back to the Refuge festivities.

"I'll never say again that men choose guilt when they might have gold," said my sister, after he was gone. "The women are quite as bad!"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"I mean what I say," she returned; "and if you don't understand now, you may in time. And haven't we spent a sentimental

evening, for two old people who never fell in love in their lives!"

Oh, Ruth, Ruth! I hope you did not take my silence for assent to that last statement of yours, though I hadn't courage to contradict it. But it does not matter much, for you didn't mean it!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HOUSE BEHIND ST. CROSS.

THE weather did not mend, and we were unvisited prisoners in our house until after the New Year. But at the end of the first week in January, there came a glorious day, not bleak with wintry cold, nor rough with wind, nor yet heavy with the stifling moisture of unseasonable heat. It was almost like the first day of spring—a little too early—escaped from the prison-house of the year, before the storms were passed; as Noah's dove left the Ark before the flood was over. We knew—and so did the birds—that it was too bright and fair to last,—that to-morrow might bring back the mist and rain. But we shall have little

pleasure in this life, if we do not treasure all the little bits we can find. Do you suppose Noah threw away the olive-branch because it was not a tree? And so the birds twittered, and we went out.

We went up the road towards St. Cross, choosing that direction for two reasons, because it was hilly, and so secure from any latent moisture, and because we wished to visit my new house behind the church. It was now completed, or at least very nearly so, for the locksmith and the varnisher were the workmen now employed.

As we toiled up the ascent, we were arrested by a cheerful salute from behind, and turning round, we found Mr. Marten and his friends the Blakes hastening to overtake us; and we waited till they came up.

“We have intended you a visit ever since Christmas,” said the rector, as he shook hands; “but the weather has always for-

bidden it until to-day. We have just been at your house, and the servant told us where we should find you."

"Then let us all return instantly, and have a comfortable luncheon," I answered.

"Oh, no," returned Mr. Marten; "we can chat as we walk, and have the benefit of the fresh air and exercise besides. We have not had a long journey—only as far as the High Street."

"Have you been to the Refuge, then?" I asked.

"No," he replied with a slight hesitation; "in fact—in short—," speaking briskly at last, "Mr. Garrett, I planned this morning-visit as a fitting opportunity to introduce Miss Blake—as my future wife."

We made a slight pause, and congratulated the young lady, who was duly diffident and blushing. And I think the rector was a little disappointed to find we expressed no surprise.

“It is no new happiness to me,” he said. “We both thought best to keep it quiet until our circumstances justified us in commencing preparations for the event. I have looked forward to the pleasure of telling you my good fortune ever since the first of May last year; and Marian and I hope to be married on that date this year, which will allow us five months to make our very simple arrangements.”

At this juncture, Lieutenant Blake kindly enlightened us on the purpose of that morning’s visit to Upper Mallowe village. “We’ve been looking over a house,” said he, with a wink intended to be highly comical.

“But you have not taken it?” I asked hastily.

“No,” answered Mr. Marten, shaking his head with a dash of his old despondency; “but we must. There is no better one to be had. Do you know it?—that small grey

house, at the angle of the High Street and Pleasant Lane ?”

“Which lane’s name goes by the rule of contrary as most names do,” put in the gallant old sailor.

“Have you looked at any others ?” inquired Ruth.

“Yes,” he replied ; “we looked at a cottage in the lane by the Low Meadow,—a very pretty cottage too, but that situation is damp. The kitchen walls were discoloured by it. Then we looked over a house on the high-road to Mallowe,—a nice house, but it was only to be let on lease ; and that arrangement is not always convenient for a clergyman. And there are no other unoccupied houses in the neighbourhood.”

“Except that behind St. Cross,” I remarked carelessly.

“Ah, but that is above our means,” said he.

“You see I built it for an income of two

hundred a-year, exclusive of house rent," I observed.

"Ah, I remember you said so," he responded.

"And I fixed on this income, because it is that of the rectors of St. Cross——"

"I beg your pardon," he interrupted, "we receive only two hundred, inclusive of all personal expenses."

"And I intend this house as a gift to the rectory of St. Cross," I continued, not heeding his interruption, "and my solicitor in London is at the present time engaged in preparing the necessary deeds."

And then we made another little pause, and went through another confusion of acknowledgments and congratulations, which were all very pleasant to hear, but would make very stupid reading, and I interrupted them by proposing we should all go and survey the "Parsonage." I wanted to fix that name to the house; I did not wish it

to be the "Rectory." Whenever a thing is well expressed by a Saxon word, why should we not use it in preference to one springing from a Latin root? When there is not a Saxon word, let us take the Latin and be thankful; but why should we seek abroad for what we can find at home?

We soon reached the building, and we lingered just a moment to criticise its exterior. Its red-brick front was slightly relieved by the stone copings and window-sills, and Miss Blake exclaimed delightedly at the little trellis-work porch, which I had caused to be erected, thinking that one of brick or stone would be far too heavy for the modest size of the building; while I was determined to have a porch of some kind, that any guest might find the house a true refuge for shelter or shade even before its door was opened. Then we all walked up the gravel path, between two plots of ground, which now gave but a barren suggestion of future

beds. In the porch, I invited all the party to turn and survey the beautiful view below—lovely even now in leafless January. The back of the house did not command so fine a view—the country there was flatter—therefore I had given it the larger garden, so that the future household might rejoice on the one side in the telescopic magnificence of valley, river, and distant hill, and on the other, in the microscopic beauties of flower and leaf. I explained this as we stood in the porch, and then we entered the hall.

The tiling of the floor was laid in a neat pattern of buff and black, and the walls were engrained as oak and varnished.

“They will wash over and over again, Lewis, and then look as well as ever.” said Miss Marian, stroking them quite lovingly; “and, papa, there will be no little marks like those which are always on our hall paper at home, though nobody knows how they come. And here is a nice fixture hat-

rail; and see! a lamp-bracket, and a lifting-flap for a table! How charming! There are only one or two chairs wanted to perfectly furnish the hall."

We passed on to the room destined for the library. I drew their attention to its being painted in a pale buff.

"I told my brother to choose a perfectly neutral tint," said Ruth, "that you might not be limited in your choice of carpets and chair-covers. Now, if your tastes be gay, you can have blue, or green, or pink, if you like."

"I think we will have brown leather chairs here, Marian," observed the rector, thoughtfully: "they are expensive, but they wear well."

"What wears well is never expensive," said my sister; "for granting that you have in hand sufficient money for the first outlay, how can you invest it better than by buying what will last?"

“And see, Marian,” said Mr. Marten, “here are glass book-fixtures, with little cupboards below, at each side of the fireplace. I think these will hold all the books I have at present.”

“I thought they would receive a tolerable library,” I observed; but the rector did not heed my words, for he was reflectively stroking his whiskers and planning the furniture.

“I wonder, Marian,” said he, and paused — “I wonder,” he repeated, “if we might make this room at once library and dining-room.”

“That would be very pleasant,” said the young lady; “for then the other might be quite a drawing-room.”

“Don’t think of such a thing,” observed Ruth, emphatically. “You think, Mr. Marten, that because you will always join the family meals, you will lose no more time if they come to you than if you go to

them. Remember, meals must be set on the table and removed, and the pitiless servant will come and clear away your papers when you are in the middle of a sentence."

"But if we have our meals in the other room, where can we ask visitors?" inquired inexperienced little Marian.

"My dear," said Ruth, "the question is, who is most important, a morning caller or the master of the house? Shall you keep a room at the service of the idle guest who *may* come, or shall you cultivate the peace and comfort of him who gives the household its very existence?"

Marian's lip almost quivered.

"I know which you wish to do," said my sister, quite gently, "and I know the proposal came from Mr. Marten himself; but if you take my sincere advice, you'll not think of 'drawing-rooms.' What you want is a nice, snug, pretty parlour, which will be

quite a pleasant change for the rector when he leaves his book-room. And let me remind you, my dear, that whenever the parlour is particularly engaged by dinner or tea, then the library, in its turn, will be free to receive a visitor until the other room is at liberty."

"But still there are grand 'occasions' in all families sometimes," I said; "and a little due provision for these when furnishing a house often saves much future worry and annoyance."

"Ah, suppose I bought a sideboard and a dining-table for this room?" queried the rector. "I could put my desk on the table, and it would give a delightful surface for my papers and reference-books; and then the room would be quite prepared for any emergency, and yet need not be used for convivial purposes, except on the arrival of those guests for whose sake I should keep holiday myself."

“That will be very convenient indeed,” I assented, “for this reason especially, that when respected visitors are to be entertained, the mistress of a small household must generally superintend the arrangement of the dining-room herself, and it is not always pleasant to do so in the room where the company is seated.”

“’Um, I suppose not,” answered Ruth, as if conceding to a common human weakness; “but, for my part, I can’t see why she cannot go through that as gracefully as through her performance on the piano.”

“A great woman could, but I think I could not,” said modest little Marian; and Ruth was mollified, and smiled kindly upon her.

Then we adjourned from the library to the parlour, where the wall tinting was grey. There we held a discussion about carpets, and Ruth strongly recommended a good one

of a small pattern, as least likely to display the unavoidable marks of wear and tear. In this room Miss Blake was in her element, walking from side to side, and imagining all possible kinds of furniture in all possible positions. I found she had already sundry treasures designed for the decoration of this peculiarly feminine domain—such as pictures, china, and miniature statuary—about which she held half-whispered consultations with her father, the lieutenant, whose stereotyped answer was, “Yes, that will be certainly the best, my dear. What pleases you will be the right thing; you’ve a nice taste, and so had your mother, Marian.”

Then we surveyed the bedrooms, making very wise sanitary remarks thereon, and the rector observed that “for the present” (how I liked that!) Marian could have one of them for a little boudoir or study of her own, and she said she would have the small

room above the hall—guided to that choice by its pretty fancy window. It was delightful to find that the new parsonage was certainly exactly to the taste of the first pair who would make it their home.

Lastly, we descended the stairs, and went into the back garden. It was not large, though of considerable extent for the size of the house. Beyond causing the ground to be put in a good state, I had not done much with it. I was too much of a Londoner, by education, to know much of the theory or practice of gardening, so I had resolved from the first to leave this matter to the taste of the future master. My sister was not so ignorant; she was quite able to enter into a conversation about it with Mr. Marten.

“By all means, plant some dwarf fruit-trees, sir,” said she; “they give us three pleasures in the year—the beauty of their blossoms, the beauty of their fruit, and the sweetness of the dessert. I don’t know why

they are depreciated while flowers are so admired, unless, indeed, it is because they are useful; for it is only too common to say, this thing is made for use, and that for ornament. And if anything be both useful and ornamental, its use is used and its beauty is never observed!"

I fear the bride-elect did not hear these remarks, for at that moment she came towards Mr. Marten, saying, "Lewis, isn't it *almost* a pity that the kitchen windows look into this garden?"

"Why so?" asked my sister a little quickly (for she knew I was the architect of the house—which, by the way, Miss Blake very likely did not, since Mr. Marten would scarcely have mentioned such a circumstance, when he never supposed the building had anything to do with them). "Why is it a pity, Miss Blake? I would not give much for the comfort of any house where the kitchen was not as pleasant to look at or to

live in as the parlour. There's real beauty in a well-scrubbed floor and a white dresser, with its stand of bright copper and tin, and its rows of plates. And it is a beauty that never tires one. And why shouldn't a kitchen be as pleasant as a parlour? It is just what I say about the fruit-trees and the flowers," she added, turning towards Mr. Marten. "A kitchen is thought meanly of because it's the most useful room in the house."

"The most useful to the commonest wants of our nature, certainly," said the rector, scarcely liking to give it unqualified supremacy over the library.

My quick sister caught the reservation. "And where would be the highest aspirations of our nature if those commonest wants were unsupplied?" she asked, triumphantly; and the reverend gentleman smiled, and did not answer.

The betrothed couple seemed unwilling

to leave the premises, and presently Ruth drew me a little aside, and whispered that they might wish to go over the rooms again without our intrusive presence. The suggestion was full of kindly sympathy, but this was the mask it wore: "We had better leave them to themselves, Edward. I dare say he has some nonsense to say to her, which we must not hear."

When we two were once more at home, chatting in the twilight, my mind reverted to our poor Agnes, whom we had not seen since we had learned the secret of her short history.

"Ah, Ruth," I said, "I only wish her future was as full of the promise of peace and comfort as is little Marian Blake's."

"Have some more sensible wishes, Edward," rejoined my sister,— "wish that chickens swam, and peacocks flew, and that everything changed its nature. One wish will be quite as rational as the other."

CHAPTER IX.

PRO AND CON.

IT was not until the latter end of January, that we had a visit from Miss Herbert, though we saw her two or three times in the interval—meeting her in the lanes or at the Refuge. During that time Alice M'Callum was never seen beyond her own threshold, except on the way to church. She was not ill ; her duties were performed with unfailing diligence ; she was only taking to herself one of those spiritual disciplines which are far more painful than any of the jagged crosses or hair shirts of fanatic devotees. She said nothing, and we said nothing ; but we heard the story from Mr. Weston, who now made ample atonement for the neglect he had re-

cently shown us. After the first paroxysm of disappointment, he had tried, as we knew, to take his rejection coolly—to alienate himself totally from his recent pleasant associations—nay, even to disparage the blessing which had proved beyond his reach. But he could not do it. His better nature triumphed. His heart softened towards the innocent woman who had suffered in his suffering. And even when his renewed pleas were still set aside by the same gently stern answer that “it could not be,” he did not now turn his back on Upper Mallowe in wrath and bitterness, but still visited the Refuge as a friend might, but not without an unspoken hope that quiet perseverance in patient waiting would win its own at last.

He had made a call at our house, and was just leaving us, on the day when Agnes Herbert at last arrived. They passed each other in the garden with a silent salutation; for their mutual acquaintance had never ad-

vanced beyond a knowledge of each other's names. Then Agnes joined us in the parlour.

Of course, whatever Mr. Herbert might intend, we did not mean to thrust our counsel on the girl. The knowledge Mrs. Irons had given us might somewhat influence our conversation with her, and it would give us the advantage of perfect information should she of her own accord seek our advice or sympathy. We could do no more.

Tea-time passed by in the most comfortable and common-place manner—how those adjectives always belong to each other! Once or twice I thought Agnes was a little abstracted; once or twice I fancied she was about to speak, and then reserved her remark. And the event proved I was not mistaken. While Phillis removed the tea-tray, and the ladies settled themselves for the evening, I went into the back parlour to

seek a book. The door between the rooms was open, and I heard Agnes say, very softly, and with some apparent effort—

“Miss Garrett”—(a pause)—“I daresay you were surprised to hear I have a cousin Herbert!”

I thought silently, perhaps her long absence from our house had been caused by doubts whether she should make this allusion, or wholly ignore the incident of the Christmas gathering.

“I was rather surprised,” said Ruth.

“I think my uncle has told you all about it?” asked Agnes.

“Well, my dear, he has caused us to be told,” acknowledged Ruth. “Did he tell you so?”

“He did not exactly tell me; but I fancied it from something he said,” observed Agnes.

There was a silence; then my sister remarked—

“I hope, my dear, you will do nothing rashly.”

“I don’t want to be rash,” said Agnes ; but there was a querulous tone in her voice.

“My dear,” Ruth went on, “a strong, unselfish young love is a very noble thing, and not at all to be pooh-poohed and pushed aside as it too often is. But nevertheless, my dear, it is a young thing, and therefore it needs guidance and restraint, else it may be like other young things which defeat and destroy themselves by their own wilful strength.”

“I don’t feel very young!” said Agnes, with a sigh.

“Only because your feelings are so strong that they wear you out,” replied Ruth. “When you are really old, your heart will never feel as weary, because it will never exert itself as much.”

“Ought that to make one long to be old

or not?" queried the girl. "The peace of indifference does not seem very enviable."

"My dear," said Ruth—(In all this conversation I noticed her words were gentle and her tones soft)—"My dear, when the time comes that you will find neither your tears nor your smiles are as eager as they are now, you need not bemoan that your heart is worn out and dead. It will only be at rest after its struggle, and it will awake as fresh as ever, and need rest no more!"

There was a short silence till my sister asked, "When did you last hear from young Mr. Herbert?"

"At the end of last week," Agnes replied. "I shall write to him to-morrow."

"I understand," pursued Ruth, "that the young man himself feels you ought not to sacrifice your future to his present."

Agnes answered very slowly, "If he

wishes to give me up for my sake, why should I not wish to keep him for his sake? A woman is nothing if she be not unselfish. And yet I can't say I am quite unselfish. Perhaps I can provide for my own truest happiness better even than he can."

"My dear," said Ruth again, "it is quite possible you mistake yourself. Twenty years hence you may sit at another hearth, and ponder over this conversation, and thank God for leading you to a sober happiness you don't dream of to-night."

"I may," returned Agnes, in the same slow tone, "for we never know what we may become. The day *may* come when I shall find all my happiness in fine tables, and chairs, and carpets—many women do." Then with sudden energy she added, "But I pray I never shall."

"Ah," said Ruth, still gently, "but even in the midst of their own dreams young

things must not forget that life has many treasures and duties besides that love which is courtship. That must pass away. It can be but the glamour of the dawn. The working hours come after."

"I don't think I ever knew that glamour," answered Agnes; "I did not feel much like a girl when I first came to my uncle's farm. I was weary, and frightened, and sad, but Ralph had patience with me, and did little things to please me. And I never had a brother, and he never had a sister, and I had been accustomed to come and go alone, and it seemed so different to have him. I have grown another being with Ralph. I was very narrow and cold before."

"I can understand that," said my sister, "but it says nothing special in praise of your cousin. His very faults may have corrected yours. Your toleration may have grown larger merely to admit him, and

your patience may have increased because he gave it practice."

"I know that Ralph has faults. I always knew it," cried Agnes, "and that is why I think I never knew the glamour. Every one must have faults, and Ralph's suit me. I can see them and bear them. After every little quarrel we ever had I loved him better."

"My dear, my dear," said Ruth, a little startled by this outburst, "I believe all that you say; but your heart is very warm and enthusiastic, and perhaps you love Mr. Ralph better than you might if he deserved it more."

"Don't say 'deserved it more,' please," answered Agnes, "for if he had stayed at home, and his father had never quarrelled with him, and none of his friends had deserted him, I don't think I should have loved him less, though I might have made believe so, even to myself."

“ You believe your cousin a genius,” pursued my sister, “ and a genius made doubly interesting by persecution and misfortune. But in all this there is no satisfactory basis for love. Genius is worth nothing without stable principles. Nay, more, genius needs uncommonly stable principles, or it will overbalance the whole character. A cart-horse will go steadily where a racer will gallop to destruction and death.”

“ Yet the racer might pause the soonest if a voice that he loved called him,” whispered the girl.

“ Then again,” continued Ruth, not heeding this parenthesis, “ I know that persecution and misfortune continually attract that pity which constantly leads to love. But remember, a brave heart shrinks from pity, and takes its troubles and conquers them silently! Thus some whom the world calls most fortunate God knows to be really martyrs, while mistaken human sympathy

reserves itself for those who sit in sackcloth and ashes, which they richly deserve, but which they could take off directly if they chose, only that they have a morbid taste for misery, and yet, Agnes, *you* did not pity Anne Sanders."

"Miss Garrett, you don't compare Ralph with *her*?" queried Agnes, indignantly.

"No, my dear, I do not," answered my sister, "for I know what she is, and I do not yet know him; and I know that she has contrived to alienate all hearts from her, while your cousin has secured at least two—yours and Mrs. Irons', and I think Ewen M'Callum's beside."

"You will like Ralph when you know him," said Agnes, softly.

"I hope I may," returned Ruth. "I almost think I shall; but I scarcely think I shall respect and honour him."

"He is but a young man," said his defender.

“There are some young people whom I respect and honour,” answered my sister. “But I fear your cousin is one of those characters which are constantly called ‘victims to circumstance.’ I grant that he could not help your uncle’s aversion to his tastes; and I do not say that he should immediately have put aside those tastes. But he should have carried them out modestly and gently, doing his utmost to disarm his father’s opposition. Now, from what I hear of his conduct, it tended to justify and confirm Mr. Herbert’s prejudices. I see these truths pain you, Agnes; but it is better you should hear them now, than learn them when it is too late.”

“But, then,” said the girl, with a checked sob in her voice, “if it had not been for my uncle’s prejudice, Ralph would not have been tempted to do as he did.”

“If the devil had not tempted Eve to eat

the apple, we should all be in Eden to-day," returned Ruth.

"Ah, I know it is not a sound argument in that way," sighed Agnes; "but I mean this, that some who are flattered and caressed, and called the ornaments of their family, might have fallen as Ralph did, if they had been tried as he was."

"Still a false argument," said my sister, "for I believe all have their trials, and that too at their weakest point. If adversity be our ordeal, and it ruins us in one way, prosperity, had it been allotted to us, would ruin us in another."

"Oh, I cannot argue about it," cried the poor girl. "I only know that Ralph has nobody but me, and I will not desert him,—let any one say what they may!"

"But a groundless love is like a rootless plant," said Ruth,—“fair enough, for the time, but easily carried away by a passing hand or a breath of wind.”

“A groundless love?” queried Agnes, with bitter daring. “Is love well grounded on a pretty face or a sweet voice, or a thousand pounds, or a family connexion? I love Ralph because he loves me, and because he has nobody else to love him!”

There was a pause. “But, my dear,” said Ruth, “it is very easy to sit quietly in your uncle’s comfortable rooms, and work out a pretty romance for yourself. But romance is seldom very easy living. It generally develops itself in cheap marketings, and common dresses, and frowsiness. Romance can seldom afford to be perfectly clean, and sometimes it teaches the way to the pawnbroker’s back door, and imparts other valuable information which does not inform the mind so much as it breaks the heart. It is only in novels that penury has white dresses and spotless table-cloths, and does not become jaded and grey, and drawn about the mouth!”

Agnes laughed that half-reckless laugh which is so sad from sweet young lips. "I know what penury is," she said; "I know all about it. I have borne it before; and for his sake I can bear it again. If I were a man, I would not accept a love which feared such things. And after all, I believe many a woman would joyfully pay this price—ay, and double!—if so she might marry the first whom she ever loved!"

Ruth drew a long breath—something like a sigh.

Just then I heard by the rustle of Agnes's dress, that she rose from her seat and crossed the room to my sister's side; there I think she kneeled down. They both knew perfectly well that I was within hearing of every word, and that I could not escape from the back parlour except by passing through the front one.

"Miss Garrett," said Agnes, and somehow I fancied she laid both her hands on my

sister's arm, "let me do what I can. Ralph will be so much better with some one always to love and care for him——"

"And for this hope you will sacrifice everything?" said my sister, and then I think she took Agnes's face between her hands.

"No, not sacrifice," sobbed the girl. "I don't sacrifice anything; it is my delight—my glory!"

"But we must never set aside one duty for another," said Ruth. "How can you desert your uncle?"

I wish I had seen Agnes's eyes when she answered, in a solemn whisper, "Can I serve the father better than by serving his son?"

Then there was a long pause, with a low sound of tears, and then total silence,—till suddenly there was a general movement, and Agnes remarked, with a forced attempt at her accustomed voice, that it was nearly

time for her to go home. Upon which I availed myself of the opportunity to return to the front parlour, and found my sister knitting as busily as usual, while our young visitor was extricating her veil from some entanglement with her bonnet, preparatory to dressing herself for the homeward walk, that when Mrs. Irons called for her, she might not be kept waiting.

“And so Mr. Marten is to marry Miss Blake,” she observed, by way of passing remark, as she stood before the mirror, settling her bonnet-strings.

“Yes,” said Ruth; “how did you hear about it?”

“Mrs. Irons told me yesterday, when she came from shopping in the village,” Agnes answered. “I suppose she heard it there.”

“We only knew it at the beginning of this month,” said my sister. “Did Mrs. Irons also hear of the destiny of the house behind St. Cross?”

“Yes,” replied Agnes, half turning from the glass, and so displaying her tear-stained face. “I am sure *they* ought to be very happy,”—this a little bitterly.

“My dear,” said Ruth, “there is an old truism, that after all none of us would like to change ourselves into the people whom we envy. Each has something which he values above anything that others have. This may sound very trite; but that’s a word which fits most old precepts. Now, I think that if a maxim fits ourselves, it is just as new as if it had never been used by any one else.”

“And there will be another wedding soon, will there not?” queried Agnes, after a pause. “And I should think that will be a very happy one. Is not Mr. Weston, of Meadow Farm, to marry our Alice M‘Callum?”

“Who told you that?” asked Ruth, sharply.

“My uncle said he thought so,” replied Agnes. “It was a wonder to hear him speak about such a thing; but he likes Mr. Weston, and Alice is a great favourite of his. He said it would be a most comfortable marriage, and no great rise for the bride, let people say what they would; for she was a farmer’s daughter, and he was a farmer’s son; and a little difference in fortune was nothing between the two.” — And Agnes smiled dimly as she repeated her uncle’s words.

“Your uncle and you have both made a mistake,” said my sister, rather dryly. “At present there is no prospect of such a marriage. Alice refuses to enter another family, while the stain of that old accusation rests upon her own. Instead of the happiness and prosperity which you imagine, there is nothing but disappointment and trial and patient endurance.”

“Is it really so?” queried Agnes. “But

surely Alice is wrong! She should feel that a man who loves her at all will only love her better for anything which makes others undervalue her."

"Men and women love very differently, my dear," said Ruth, with a shake of her head.

"But, poor Alice, how I pity her! It stings us so when those we have envied need our pity," sighed Agnes. And when she went away I think she was strengthened to bear her own troubles, because there were tears in her eyes for troubles which were not her own.

"Miss Herbert resisted all your arguments, Ruth," I remarked, when my sister and I were once more alone.

"Yes," said Ruth, shortly; "and I like her the better for it. Of course she is a simpleton; but such simpletons are the oil which keep the world's wheels from grating hopelessly."

“Then do you think she will realise her loving hopes?” I questioned, rather sentimentally.

“Twenty years hence,” said my sister, “she will be a quiet, timid, middle-aged woman, a little faded, and a little given to defer overmuch to ‘Mr. Herbert,’ who will, in general, patronise her very kindly. But perhaps sometimes he will say, ‘Little woman, where should I be without you?’ And then Agnes will have her reward. And I think her children will rise up and call her blessed. And she will have a harder life than many a noisy woman who fancies herself a victim to her zeal for public good; and in heaven, maybe, she will have a brighter crown.”

Ah, my pretty Agnes, I gave one or two sighs to think of you in your future struggles, and yet I could not wish you acted otherwise than you did. “Should you like a daughter of your own to have such a

fate?" asks some critical and prudent mother. Well, if a daughter of my own met a destiny like Margaret Roper at her father's scaffold, or like Lucy Hutchinson outside her Puritan husband's prison, or like Anita Garibaldi in her hunted death, my heart would be pained, but I should not wish them other than they were. There are pains which are sweeter than any pleasures. There are natures which choose the palm as the fairest flower which earth can offer.

CHAPTER X.

THE HISTORY OF THE MYSTERY.

IT was the second day after Miss Herbert's visit, and the first day of February. The weather, which had been tolerably fine for the last two or three weeks, was revenging itself. The rain descended in torrents, driven about by the wind, which, like a changeable, passionate woman, now sobbed among the leafless trees, and then scolded down the chimneys and round the house. But it happened Ruth and I were provided with abundant indoor occupations, for we had just received the annual accounts of the Refuge, and their various items gave us plenty of material for reflection and discussion. By evening I had drawn up a

balance-sheet, and a most satisfactory one it was, with a tolerable surplus at the right side, which would enable us to extend our sympathies more courageously in the coming year. As for the little orphan home, whose accounts were included in those of the Refuge, its expenses for the future would be small indeed, now its erection and furniture were fairly paid. Its benefits were already shared by two little sisters, who paid their weekly board by their labours at the village dressmaker's, but who would have been but poorly off if thrown entirely on their own exertions.

So we passed a very pleasant day, and I was in such a comfortable and cheery mood that I did not shrink from contemplating the dreary aspect out of doors. So I pulled aside the red curtain, and lifted the blind, and stood between it and the cold, damp window, and reported to Ruth that it was a "dreadful night"—"not fit for a dog to be

abroad ;” and then I thought how London looked at that hour—how the City men jogged home through murk and mud, and the gaslights flared on shining pavements, and poor women went a-marketing with broken shoes that lapped the puddles as they passed along.

But my reverie was suddenly interrupted by the sound of rapid wheels coming down the lane, and a fly-lamp flashed like a will-o'-the-wisp through the darkness of the garden hedge. A voice called sharply, and the vehicle stopped at our gate. Somebody came up the garden path, and there was one of those quick, urgent knocks which make the heart leap, and the feet hurry to the parlour door to anticipate the servant's announcement.

Phillis ran so eagerly to the parlour, that she nearly flew against me. “Oh, please, sir,” said she, “it's young Mr. M'Callum !”

He followed close behind her, with a white, anxious face, which made me instantly think of my old friends of the firm. "Come in, Ewen," I said, taking his cold hand; "what is the matter, my boy?"

"Ralph Herbert is not here?" was his questioning response.

"Certainly not," I answered. "Is anything wrong?"

"He has left our place in London," said Ewen. "They tell me he started off almost immediately after I left home this morning."

"Not a very long absence," observed Ruth.

Her cool words seemed somewhat to reassure Ewen. It is pleasant to think a danger may exist only in one's own excited imagination. But, in a second, he recalled the more tangible reasons for his fears. "I left home before the first post came in," he said, "and our landlady says there was a

letter for him. And I know he had an important appointment in town for this evening, when he was to receive the payment for some pictures. And I know he wanted the money."

"And he hasn't kept that appointment, or made any arrangement about it?" queried my sister.

"No; I went to the gentleman, to learn if he knew anything," explained Ewen; "and, finding he did not, I made as good an excuse as I could, and came straight down here. I had chanced to leave business very early to-day, or I should not have been here to-night."

"Did you fancy he might be in the village?" I asked.

"I thought it just possible," said the young man. "I think this morning's letter was from Miss Herbert. I know he expected one from her."

"Is it likely there is a reconciliation,"

I said, "and that he is at the Great Farm?"

Ewen shook his head. "I fear not," he answered. "If there had been good news, he would have left a note for me."

"A thoughtless omission, under any circumstances," said Ruth; "tacking trouble to trouble's tail."

"What do you propose, Ewen?" I asked.

"I must go to the Great Farm," he said, with a long breath; "and I thought, sir, if you will go with me—but it's such a shocking night—only poor Miss Herbert!"

"I'll go," I answered.

"Have you kept the fly, Ewen?" asked my sister.

"Oh yes, ma'am," he replied—"it's waiting at the gate."

"That's right. You have sense," said Ruth.

We soon rattled through the dense darkness of the road into the broad light of the lamp over the Great Farm door. It was not until Ewen rang the bell that I marvelled what would result from our daring to disturb Mr. Herbert on such a subject.

Mrs. Irons admitted us. "Heaven help us!" she cried, when she saw my companion. "It's something wrong with Mr. Ralph!"

"Hush, hush!" said Ewen, "and tell us, is your master within?"

"No, no, he isn't," she answered: "he's away, at a farmers' dinner at the 'Red Lion.' Miss Agnes is in the dining-room; but, whatever it be, don't show your face, Ewen M'Callum, till Mr. Garrett goes in first. And tell me what it is—for I nussed him, I did, sir."

"It's nothing yet," said Ewen, soothingly. "I hoped he might have been here before us, Mrs. Irons."

“Then it’s missing, he is!” wailed the poor old soul; “and the Lord ha’ mercy on Miss Agnes!”

I went to the dining-room, and, in answer to my knock, Agnes gave a soft “come in!” There was a blazing fire in the wide grate, but otherwise the room was but dimly lighted by a shaded lamp, whose rays scarcely travelled to the pictures on the wall. Agnes sat in front of the fire, her slight figure almost lost in the roomy depths of her uncle’s great arm-chair. There was a basket of white work beside her. She rose when she saw it was a visitor; and Griff, the dog, stood at her feet, and wagged his tail.

“Mr. Garrett!” she exclaimed, surprised. But, as I came forward into the light, her face inexpressibly darkened, and she was totally silent.

“Sit down, my dear,” I said; “I have only a question to ask.”

She stood still, and awaited it.

“Have you heard from your cousin Ralph during the day?”

“No,” she said, with great eyes.

“He left home unexpectedly this morning,” I said, “and he has not returned. And so Mr. M‘Callum is anxious about him—perhaps unduly anxious—that is all.”

Ewen entered softly. Till then, he had waited at the door. Agnes looked blankly at him, and spoke no word.

“Mr. M‘Callum thinks your cousin had a letter from you this morning,” I said. “Is he right?”

“Yes,” she answered.

I remembered Ruth’s recent conversation with her. Might it be that had given a tone to her letter which had worked this disaster?

“My dear,” I began gently, “was there anything in that letter which could possibly cause this?”

She looked at me for a moment, only half comprehending, and then exclaimed, "No, no, nothing at all. O God! if there had been, what should I do now?"

She turned to Ewen. "What shall we do? What can *I* do? Where can I go?"

The young man bowed his head. "Whatever can be done, shall be done," he said; "I will do it."

"Perhaps it is only an accidental mistake," I remarked.

"It may be, it may be," exclaimed Agnes, eagerly. "I am so glad uncle is out. He need not know yet. If it be nothing, he would only be so angry and dreadful! And if it be anything, let us keep it till we are quite sure."

To prolong our visit was useless, and only wasted time. With a promise that anything we might learn should be instantly communicated to her, we took our departure. She came with us to the outer doors,

and stood on the step till we drove off. It would have relieved her to have rushed out in the darkness—anywhere—anywhere—better than the silent dining-room, and the waiting and the watching—the woman's part in the tragedy of life!

“Let us drive to the inn in the High Street,” said Ewen, “and ask what visitors they have. He may be there, intending to send to his cousin to-morrow morning.”

We did so. We were shown into the tap-room to take a silent survey of two unconscious young men sitting there, smoking pipes and reading sporting papers. Neither of them was Ralph Herbert. When we left the inn, the weather had cleared, and we dismissed our fly, and walked slowly down the High Street to the Railway Station, consulting as we went. Now the Police Station was in this High Street. Of course it was a very small unpretending affair, suited to the modest requirements of a quiet

and respectable village. But to-night there was a vague air of excitement about. The resident policemen were indulging in a dignified gossip with another official, and they suspended their chat as we came up, and looked at us with unusual interest. I nodded to one of them whom I happened to know, and we passed on. Our intention was to make inquiries of the guards at the railway station. Ewen had not done so when he arrived, in case Mr. Ralph had simply found reason to visit his home. Even now, we wished to make our inquiries as cautiously as possible, not to awaken unnecessary curiosity. So I went up to an intelligent-looking guard, and asked him if he happened to know young Mr. Herbert.

“Young Mr. Herbert?” repeated the man.
“Yes, sir; he came up from London by the train to-day, sir.”

“Thank you,” I answered, “that is what

I wish to know. By which train did he come?"

"Let us see," pondered the guard, giving his cap a little jerk from his brow. "My wife had just brought me my dinner, for 'twas her said, 'Tom, there's the young squire.' So 'twas the one o'clock train, sir."

"Thank you," I replied, leaving him a little consideration for his civility, and then returned with my news to Ewen. It only increased the mystery, and not knowing where else to go, we slowly returned up the High Street. The little group still stood about the Police Station. A new idea struck me. I disengaged my arm from Ewen's, and accosted the policeman, whom I knew.

"Is anything the matter to-night, Mr. Jones?"

"Nothing in particular, sir," said he.

"Because we are looking for a young

friend who came into the village to-day; but whom we cannot find.”

“Indeed, sir,” said the man civilly. But one of the others jogged his elbow, and suggested, “Ask the gentleman what’s his friend’s name, Jones.”

In response to this, I said at once, “It is young Mr. Herbert.”

“Then it’s all right, sir,” answered Jones, with a quick side-glance at Ewen. “The young gentleman’s safe inside.”

“Inside the Police Station?” I exclaimed, and Ewen uttered a peculiar and inarticulate ejaculation.

“He gave himself up,” explained our informant; “and between you and me, sir, I shouldn’t wonder if he’s a little turned in the head. For he walked straight in, as jolly like as possible, and says he, ‘Here, Mr. Jones, I know all about George Roper’s death in the Low Meadow. Just put me in

your cell for to-night, and bring me up before the justices to-morrow, and I'll tell 'em all about it. He wouldn't enter into no particulars with me, sir, so I was obliged to put him under arrest, knowin' as the job was brought in a murder, and nobody was convicted of it;" with another side glance at Ewen.

"This is most extraordinary," I said. "Cannot we be permitted to see him?"

"Certainly, sir," granted the civil official; "we'd ha' sent to the Great Farm for him, or to any other friend's, but he wouldn't let us. I'm glad you've found him out. It's a dirty thing to have a prisoner like a rat in a hole with the dogs arter it, and no one to take its part. But, begging your pardon, sir," added the man, turning to Ewen, and continuing the same civil tone he had used through the interview, "if you won't take it amiss, I think *you'd* better not see him. Ye see folks will remember old stories, and

it might look like what the lawyers call *collusion*.”

I saw the force of this advice, and urged it upon Ewen, until he reluctantly accepted it, saying that he would go back to the Great Farm, and tell Miss Herbert of her cousin's safety, and then return and rejoin me in the High Street.

Leaving him to carry the painful news to poor Agnes, I followed the policeman to the safe-room of the little station. The place was sufficiently clean and comfortable. The cell opened at the end of a passage, and was lit by a small lamp placed on a bracket above the door. The voluntary prisoner sat on a bare bench beside a little fixture-table in the middle of the room.

“Here's a gentleman come to see you, sir,” said Mr. Jones, ushering me in.

Ralph Herbert coloured, and started up. I fancy he thought it might be his father, for his face relaxed when he saw me, and he

held out his hand saying, "How did you find me out, Mr. Garrett? You should not have taken the trouble to come here."

"I am here for your cousin's sake as well as your own," I answered gravely, for I thought he scarcely realized the horror of his position.

"Poor Agnes!" he said, passing his hand over his face, "and she does not know about it yet!"

"She knows something," I replied, "and she will know the rest in a few minutes. Ewen came down here and raised the alarm of your disappearance, and we tracked you to this place, and now he has gone to the Great Farm to tell her. I hope she will bear it well."

"Ewen will soften it as much as he can," he answered, sadly.

"And now," I said, taking a seat on the bench beside him, "we must make some preparations for to-morrow. They tell me that

you profess to have the secret of George Roper's murder."

"I have the secret of George Roper's *death*," he replied with an emphasis, raising his eyes and looking me full in the face. "There was no murder."

"Ewen was not the last who saw Roper alive," he continued after a moment's pause. "I met him after they parted. I had come from London expressly to meet him, because there were some accounts between us. I owed him a small sum, and he owed me a much larger one, and I wanted him to deduct my debt from his and pay me the surplus, which was a very serious affair to me just then. He was not sober. He paid me two or three pounds very easily, but I wanted a little more, which would have squared our accounts. Then he taunted me, and used dreadful language. He was always very violent when not sober. I told him I could not waste time and money in

journeys from London to Mallowe, and that was why I wished to settle the matters between us. I can't think why he was so fierce, but he flew at my throat like a wild animal, and I felt something prick me, but I caught his hands and wrenched an open knife from them. I held him with one hand while I threw it as far across the fields as I could, that he might not regain it. It took all my strength to keep him, and when I saw my own blood trickling down my dress, I turned sick and faint, and I put all my powers into one effort, and threw him full-length on the path. 'You murderous madman!' I said, 'lie there while I fetch somebody who will stop your mischief for the future.' I don't know what I meant myself, for I never really thought of making a disturbance in my own father's village. But I suppose he believed me. I looked back when I cleared the field. He had not attempted to follow

me. He was sitting at the edge of the stream, and he shouted after me, 'I shan't be here when you come back. You've taken the knife, but you've left the water.' I took no notice of his words then, but went across the fields and bound up my own wound, which was very slight. I walked the whole way to London, for I wanted all my money to carry me to Paris, where I had a commission about a picture. I never knew of Roper's death until weeks afterwards, when I read an announcement of the discovery of his body in an old newspaper."

"Then you saw the accusation against Ewen, I suppose?" I queried.

"No, I didn't : it was not in that paper," he said eagerly. "I had suffered a great deal from many causes, and though I never dreamed that Roper's death could be thought other than a suicide, yet I regarded myself—and I regard myself still—as his murderer,

through the foolish threat which drove a frenzied, drunken man to his end. I tried to lose my own identity. For more than a year I suffered horrors I can never describe, until, through inability to work at my art, I was driven to the point of destitution. Then I ventured to Mallowe, to try to recover another small debt due to me. I dared not attempt to present myself to any who knew me. One night, when I was lurking about in the darkness, I met you and the rector. Another winter night—and that was the night when I stole to my father's back door and his good old servant fed me like a beggarman—I encountered George Roper's son. I saw his father's face in his, and scarcely needed the proof of the name of Wilmot—for I knew all the story of the deserted wife in London—and I dare say you can guess I wrote that letter about him only lately. Then I struggled on again in great misery, and

in the March following that, I met Ewen M'Callum."

There he paused and drew a long breath, like one recounting the history of his own rescue. I knew *how* he had met Ewen, but I said nothing.

"He took me home with him," he continued presently, "and he heard all my story. He did not tell me his then; but when I grew a little better I asked so many questions that it all came out. Then I wanted to come here and tell all I knew, but he would not let me."

"Should you have allowed him to hinder you?" I asked.

"Perhaps not," he answered, looking at me; "but he set it before me in this way:—That the accusation against him was only a suspicion,—that it had lost its sting,—that it no longer injured any one,—that my new story would only transfer the suspicion from him to me,—that it would drag

my family through the agony from which he had just escaped. But still I did not like to give him his will. And then he begged and prayed it of me for Agnes' sake!" And the young man raised his eyes to mine, with a strange mist in them. "And so I let it be. And you know, when I first saw you in London, I asked you if it was right to let one make a great sacrifice for another. Perhaps you remember what you said; and he threw his arms upon the table, and dropt his head upon them.

"Then what makes you reveal this secret at last?" I inquired, as gently as I could.

He replied without raising his head. "In the letter I got this morning, Agnes told me that Ewen's sister refused to marry while the supposed crime rested on her brother. I could not allow that. I should be worse than I am if I could, and less fit than ever for Agnes. I came here directly. They may not believe what I say. They may

think I killed the poor man. They may do what they like with me. But in case of anything, will you do something for me, sir ?” he asked, looking up again ; “ will you write to that address, and explain things ?” and he placed a card before me. “ It is a young man who is going out to Canada. He was to take me with him. He has a little money, and means to farm, and I know enough about agriculture to be useful to him ; for I find it is no use trying to live by my art. I mistook a taste for a talent. I found that out long ago ; but then I couldn’t go back.”

“ Does Miss Herbert know of this plan ?” I asked, pocketing the card.

“ Yes,” he said ; “ and we thought when I’d been out there a year or two, I might come home and fetch her. But that’s all over now ;” and he sighed heavily.

“ Please, sir,” interrupted Mr. Jones,

opening the door, "here's two ladies come to see you next."

They were Mrs. Irons and Agnes. I doubt if either of them even noticed my presence, and I withdrew before the first agitated embrace was over. I found Ewen in the entry, looking unutterably white and fagged.

"My boy," I said, laying my hand on his arm, "you have acted most nobly towards that unfortunate man."

Those were the first and last words I ever breathed on his unselfishness. It was above the praise of men—meet for the approval of God.

"Won't you come home and sup with us?" I asked, presently.

"No, thank you. I'll go to my grandfather's," he answered. "Poor Alice will be glad of this. I thought she had quite got over the trouble, until my last Autumn holidays, when I saw she was still pining."

For his sister had kept her secret ; and he did not yet know what Ralph Herbert had learned, and that, in his self-sacrifice, he had nearly sacrificed her. But that night of dolour and darkness at the Great Farm was the dawn of light and joy at the Refuge.

He had taken one or two steps away, when he turned back, and said, calmly enough—

“Don't call Ralph ‘unfortunate.’ One life has one blessing and another life has another ; but he has the best ! Good-night, sir.”

I watched him hastening down the splashy road. And thus the woman's love clings to the frail man and leaves this good one alone ! Is it because he knows the way to heaven without her guidance ?

CHAPTER XI.

THE JUSTICE-ROOM.

EARLY next morning I made it my business to lay the whole case before a respectable solicitor at Mallowe; and that gentleman, together with Mr. Marten and I, were in due attendance at the justice-room. Ewen and his grandfather were also there, and young George Roper accompanied his aunt, who was present to produce the hitherto mysterious knife, which now gave such proof to Ralph Herbert's narrative. Agnes too came, in my sister's charge. But her uncle was conspicuous by his absence. He had been apprised of his son's position by the rector; and Mr. Marten said, the muscles of his face had twitched sadly when he heard it, but he

only said, "My son, sir? I haven't a son. It can't concern me."

It was a sufficiently commonplace scene,—the shabby justice-room, with its worn oil-cloth, and its rows of wooden chairs, and intent faces turned towards the two old gentlemen invested with the majesty of the law: kindly enough old gentlemen, who drank port at dinner, and had dainty lady-daughters and strapping sons of their own to stir their elderly hearts, but who yet seemed strangely separate from humanity when they sat down in their awful arm-chairs, and said commonplace things through the Oracle of Justice, and sprinkled magisterial snuff over the papers of the reporter beside them. That dreadful reporter, too—whom some fear more than God or their own conscience—he was only a lank lad of twenty, with red hair. Once or twice, as the inquiry lengthened, I noticed him adding up the lines of his report, and it struck

me he was thinking of the sum he would gain by the job.

By two o'clock it was all over. There was no evidence against Ralph Herbert, but every reason to credit his story, and to believe that Mr. Roper had met his death by his own rash act. The justices shook their heads very much over it, and administered little parental reproofs all round, admonishing Mr. Marten and me for having dared to conceal the discovery of the knife from the proper authorities: "Very wrong, very unwise, gentlemen; though we can understand your motives, gentlemen, and respect them. But it is not a safe course of action." And sniff, sniff, went a pinch of judicial snuff.

There was a little chamber opening from the justices' room, and it made a convenient refuge for all the more interested spectators. Only one did not avail himself of it. Directly the magistrates pronounced their

opinion, Ewen rose from his seat and softly left the place.

In that little brown room, with its solitary window looking on to a square flagged court with a broken pump in the middle, the two cousins met. Her face was just a little whiter than usual, and perhaps he held her hand a second longer than he held mine. That was all. He was as reserved as her; and yet a minute afterwards, I think the recollection of her manner troubled him. It was an utterly mute greeting. There was something to be said between the two,—but not then—not there.

“Mr. Herbert will return with us to our house,” said my sister. “You will come also, Agnes, will you not?”

“I must go home to my uncle now,” she answered, quite calmly. “So good-bye, Ralph! I shall see you again before night.”

They shook hands again, and he went with her to the door. When he rejoined us, his face was sadder and more concerned than it had been at any time during the morning.

“She has given me up,” he said, as we ushered him into our parlour. “For her sake, I ought to be very glad, but I can’t.”

“Wait a while,” answered Ruth, rather grimly, “and don’t show your selfishness before you must.”

My sister utterly refused to be won over to the side of Mr. Ralph. Except one or two curt remarks, she was courteous to him, as a stranger and in trouble, but no more. Immediately after our early tea, she announced that she should pay a visit to the Refuge. She had scarcely departed on this errand, before Agnes fulfilled her promise of an evening visit. Of course, directly she entered, I left the room. I am an old man, but my

memory is not yet decayed. I remember how it troubled me when Lucy's father called us that evening in the fields, and when her mother chanced to stand at her side the next morning. To this day, I wish it had not so happened.

I went upstairs to my own chamber, and tried to read. Sometimes in the profound silence, I caught a tone of the earnest talk in the room beneath me. I heard Ralph walk up and down after the fashion of perturbed or excited people; and so the time wore wearily away, until Ruth knocked at the hall-door, and then I went down and admitted her, because I did not wish her to interrupt the pair in the parlour. So I mysteriously beckoned her into another room, and then explained myself.

“There's no peace anywhere because of some courting couple,” said she, very tartly. “I have just been driven from the Refuge, because Mr. Weston chose to arrive. As

for these two, they have had enough. Been here ever since I left, you say? That's two hours. I shall go in, whether you will or not."

Somewhat under protest I followed her. Ralph was in my arm-chair, and Agnes was seated on a very low stool beside him. She had been crying, but now she smiled and was very rosy.

"Tell them, Ralph," said she.

"I spoke to you about Canada, last night, sir," he began with some hesitation. "My friend starts next month, and we hope to be ready to join him—Agnes and I!"

"My uncle has given permission," she whispered.

"And, of course, he thinks we encouraged you!" said Ruth, severely.

"No, he doesn't!" she answered, warmly. "I told him all about it."

"And you asked his consent?" I queried.

“I told him all about it,” she replied, humbly, “and he said I might do as I liked;—I was of age, and he wouldn’t hinder me.”

Was this some secret relenting—some hidden joy that God had given one faithful friend to the son whom he had deserted?

“Then let me wish you happiness, my dear,” I said, laying my hand on the brown head, bowed low enough in this moment of womanly triumph; “then let me wish you all peace and happiness after your trial and sorrow—the sweet sunshine after the rain!”

Ralph Herbert turned to my sister. “*You* say nothing,” he said, in a tone of sorrowful reproach.

“Yes, I do,” she answered, more kindly than she had spoken before, and laying her hand gently upon his. “I don’t say, May she never regret this day!—for she never will—but I pray that on your dying bed you

may remember it with thanksgiving, and not remorse !”

“ God helping me, so I will !” he said, solemnly. And I am sure he meant it.

CHAPTER XII.

A WEDDING WITH BELLS.

THE very next day after the inquiry in the justice-room, Ruth had a petition presented to her.

It was Mr. Weston's. He came—shyly enough, but with the confidence of eager hope—to beg my sister to join him in persuading Alice M'Callum to leave the Refuge in a month's time. This was how he stated the case, with a blush and a roguish smile.

“Leave the Refuge!” said my sister, with arch innocence: “then where is she going, sir?”

He made a fine boggle of an answer, which was intended to embrace excuses and reasons for his own haste. “If she'd said

‘Yes,’ when I asked her first, I should have named a day in early spring,” he stammered ; “and why shouldn’t it be now as if it had never been? She’s looking fagged and white, and the change of scene ’ll do her good. And the Meadow Farm’s quite ready for its mistress. And what things does she want? Can’t she get them when she’s there? Only she says you wont like such a short notice.”

“Oh, I am not the person to be considered,” said Ruth, drily. “You’d better not consult my pleasure, or I shall say I don’t like any notice at all!”

Mr. Weston took the little joke in good part, and laughed heartily. “You’re right, Miss Garrett,” he answered, quite jovially. “I should not like *her* to give *me* notice.”

“Should you not?” queried Ruth. “Ah, —I have heard some people are never so happy as when they are miserable, and I suppose that is why they rush into matri-

mony, although the 'single state is most conducive to happiness.' ”

“ Mr. Weston reddened a little and laughed again. “ Don't laugh at a poor fellow for saying the grapes were sour when they seemed out of his reach,” said he. “ I always pitied that fox in the fable.”

“ Well, he *was* pitiable,” rejoined my sister; “ but if he had gained the grapes and then praised them, I should have told him he was a coward before.”

“ When he has gained the grapes, he is so fortunate that he can afford to be called anything,” said the young man, good-humouredly.

The simple kindly farmer was far further in Ruth's good graces than the polished son of the Great Farm. She actually went with him to the Refuge, and had a long conversation with Alice and her grandfather, for Ewen had returned to London that morning with Mr. Herbert. And when

Ruth returned, she brought the news that the old adage that one wedding makes another was fulfilled in this case, and that there would be two marriages at St. Cross, while the primroses were out in the churchyard.

And for a whole month, I was a quiet shadow in the background—a person with no valuable opinions on the subjects in hand—linens, and dresses, and ribbons. I heard that Mr. Weston wished to place in Ruth's hand a considerable sum of money for the disposal of his bride, only Alice would not hear of it. She said, he must take her with what she could get herself, and he said it didn't matter to him; so I think her bridal attire would have been exceedingly simple but that Ruth's wedding gift was the wedding-dress. Mr. Weston was not at all offended because Alice accepted *that*. It was a grey silk, rich and delicate, but suited alike to the bride's loveliness, and the bridegroom's position.

After all, her wedding came first. The Herberts was fixed a single day later. Ewen arrived the evening before his sister's marriage, and said Mr. Herbert would not come until the eve of his own. And Ewen tried to keep his face bright for his sister's joy. But all the more it haunted me with that inexpressible pain which often makes weddings more sad than funerals,—the suffering of Life instead of the peace of Death.

It was a laughing spring morning, and in homely phrase, the village was "alive." St. Cross was crowded, for the M'Callums were old residents, and rendered none the less interesting by the melancholy circumstances through which they had so innocently suffered. When the bridal party stood in the chancel, I heard an old lady whisper that it was a "pretty wedding," and I think she was right. In the immediate circle the fine old grandfather, the comely bridegroom, the sweet bride, the little orphan bridesmaids

in their fresh muslins, and the grave handsome groomsman—all were pleasing and picturesque after their own fashion. And, standing behind these, Ruth and Bessie and young George Roper did not spoil the scene. And the background was made up of eager interested faces, all bright in the sunshine, which poured in through the clear windows and brought with it a sweet breath from the budding trees outside. And then the solemn service which folds the joy of man in the sanctity of God, and the happy tears, and the fond kisses, and the poor trembling maiden signature in the vestry. And then the merry bells, telling heath and hamlet that God has consecrated another home—and the ride through familiar faces that nobody sees, and the dainty meal that nobody tastes, and the good-byes, and then the silence afterwards.

Agnes was not at the wedding. It was her last day at home. A very sad last day

—when she might not weep nor smile except as her wont—when she must go about everything as if to-morrow, and the next day, and the next would be the same. Her uncle knew it was her last day in his house, he had only said, “Very well,” when she told him so, and by this silence, she knew to be silent herself.

After the morning’s excitement, I sat listlessly at our window, watching for Ralph Herbert, who was to be our guest for that night. I did not know whether to expect a visit from Agnes, and I was very pleased when she entered.

“I hear the wedding went off well,” she said. “I have written a letter to Alice, that she may receive it in her new home to-night.”

For I should have mentioned that this simple country bride had gone straight from her old home to her husband’s house, as he could ill spare a long holiday at this time

of year, when his fields needed their master's eye.

“Very thoughtful of you, my dear,” I answered, “and what finery have you there?” for she had a small parcel in her hand.

“Only all my trousseau!” she replied, laying a dainty pair of lilac gloves upon the table, and looking up with an arch smile about her lips and pathos in her eyes.

It was quite true. For her honeymoon was to be passed in no luxurious hotel, her home would be no fresh flowery bride-chambers. By nightfall after her wedding she would be in the seaport town whence the American ship sailed. By the next sunset, she would be on the sea—drifting to a new life in a rough settler farm. And so it was an emigrant's outfit and not a bride's, which filled the great boxes that encumbered our hall.

She had not been with us many minutes before she rose to go.

“ Will you not wait to see your cousin ? ” asked Ruth : “ he will be here presently . ”

“ No , ” she said , “ I must go—back . Tell him I left him my love , but I want to stay with my uncle as long as I can . I only left home now because he was out among his men . ”

I walked home with her in the twilight , speaking of the arrangements for the morrow . Nobody but those concerned knew what was about to happen . The honest labourers who touched their foreheads as Agnes passed , little dreamed it was a farewell salutation . There was something unspeakably touching in the girl going so brave and so lonely from one life to another , not even knowing her own courage and loneliness , but with the sweet perversity of woman-kind , only the more reliant on Ralph’s protection because it was but a cypher—all the prouder of him , because there was little to be proud about !

When I shook hands with her at the gate of the Farm, she held my hand a little, and probably thinking this was our last moment of undisturbed converse, she thanked me for all that Ruth and I had tried to do for her—speaking so eagerly and fervently of all the past, and yet looking so confidently and quietly into her strange dim future, that my heart was strangely stirred. But she made one omission which pained me. In her rapid anxious review of all to whom she owed any kindness, she never even named Ewen, to whom, especially for Ralph's sake, she owed so much. And I interrupted her to say—

“Nobody has shown you or Ralph more than the common kindness of humanity—except young M'Callum. I hope you quite understand what he has done. *He* deserves thanks.”

“Understand what he has done?” she echoed, “thank him? Mr. Garrett, Ewen

M'Callum is a saint, and I am only a woman!"

And she turned and obeyed the deep bay of Griff, impatiently awaiting her within the house. I stayed at the gate until she crossed the garden, and fairly closed the house door behind her. But she never turned her head.

And that was the night before the wedding.

CHAPTER XIII.

A WEDDING WITHOUT BELLS.

OUR breakfast party on the wedding morning was somewhat constrained and silent. Ralph had joined us very late the night before, and we had then no time for conversation, nor did we seem inclined for any when we gathered round the table for our morning meal. We were in our trim for the ceremony, that is to say I wore my neatest tie, and Ruth her best silk dress, for no further attempt at gala attire was possible. The parlour too was "tidied" in Ruth's strictest sense of the word; not a shred of work or writing remained about, and the china bowls and vases were duly filled with fresh primroses and hyacinths.

That was the extent of our preparation. But when Phillis brought in our toast and new-laid eggs, I thought by her glance at our visitor that she had a shrewd guess at what was going forward, though she had heard no remark to lead her to such a conclusion, and though there was nothing in the refreshments which Ruth had ordered to awaken conjecture. For there could be no sugary wedding breakfast with cakes, and champagne, and trifles, but a repast of savoury joints and poultry, substantial enough to carry the young couple to their sea-port destination.

There was a solemnity about the aspect of affairs, which crept over each of us. The very morning was solemn—not cloudy, but with a low-toned steady sunlight, and a cool still air. The shadows on our garden plot did not dance, but lay straight and still. The parlour too, with the signs of ordinary life all banished, had a conventual air, con-

sistent with bated voices and silent smiles. But even silent smiles were lacking. Yet when I thought of all this day was in Ralph's life, I could not wonder at his pale grave face, or the reddened lightless eyes that told of a sleepless night. True, he had achieved a great happiness—to him, unworthy as he felt himself, had fallen that good gift which Solomon tells us comes directly "from the Lord." But I liked the youth no less because he took his blessing with awe and trembling, nor because he did not prepare to leave his fatherland with a laugh upon his lips. Alone, he might have gone recklessly enough. Going alone, he might have said his native country cast him off, and so turned his face to another shore, and never looked behind. But now that one went with him, nothing fearing, he felt tenderly for the old place that spared him its best, and his heart yearned over the very fields where he had walked and talked with

one so pure and true. I daresay his feeling was something like that expressed in those lines of an old song, which I remember once reading, where one emigrant says to another—

“’Tis not the future makes me grieve :
But though the past is sad,
I weep my grateful thanks to God
For pleasant times I’ve had !”

Of course he made one at our little service of family worship. It is our custom to hold that service immediately after breakfast. Ruth and I agreed that it was inconsiderate to summon servants to such a duty before they had taken some refreshment after their early household work. At the risk of being thought a monotonous formalist I must explain our form of worship. I take our prayers from the book of Common Prayer—first, the general confession of sin, then the prayer for all conditions of men, concluding with the collect for the preceding

Sunday, and that is all, except on any special occasion, when I take a special petition from the Litany. For a Scripture portion I read the New Testament lesson for the day. I have often noticed how strangely appropriate these appointed portions seem, and never more so, than when on this 4th of March, I found it my duty to read the fifteenth chapter of St. Luke's Gospel. As I announced it, I involuntarily glanced at Ralph. He did not need to seek it—his Bible opened at the place, for the page was marked by a dry spray of that delicate fern which is, I think, called "maiden-hair."

When we rose from our knees, it was time to prepare for church. Ralph was the first to depart, Ewen would join him on the road—the only wedding guest beside ourselves. We waited at our window until Agnes appeared, coming steadily and gravely along the road. Then we left our house,

and she came up to us with a quiet, simple salutation, and took her place by my sister's side. But behind her, followed an attendant on whom we had not counted, even the great dog Griff, walking with a dignified solemnity fit for the occasion.

“Yes, he must come,” said his mistress, responding to our glances. “Griff goes with us. Ralph arranged that. Griff is a faithful old friend, and must not be left behind.”

“But what will he do at the church?” I asked, in dismay.

“He will wait in the porch,” she answered.

I scarcely liked to ask about her parting from her uncle, but presently she raised her eyes and said, “I have said good-bye to uncle. He did not give me a chance of saying a word; but he knows he is not likely to see me again, and he spoke very kindly.” And there the low voice faltered, and the

brown eyes filled with tears, which did not overflow, as very sad tears seldom do.

We went up the churchyard way, and entered the silent house of God, with its long misty sunbeams slanting over the empty pews. Ralph and Ewen stood in the chancel in the coloured light of the stained window. The rector saw our entrance through the half-open vestry door, and he came out, gowned, and went behind the communion rails.

There was a moment's silence—a pause—before the mysterious gate through which two lives would pass into one. Agnes was the calmer of the two, with her pale face and veiled eyes, for I saw Ralph grasp the rail before him, like one thankful for any support, while his eyes wandered vaguely to the scrolls above the table, and his lips moved in unconscious recitation of those words whose full, sweet meaning scarcely seemed for him: “Like as a *father* pitieth his chil-

dren, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

Then the service began—the service which I had heard only the day before, but which, however solemn then, now seemed to have a new and thrilling minor key. I could scarcely trust my voice in the few simple responses, but there was one whose tones rang out clear and firm in each. It was Ewen. Somehow, I could not look at him. Without a glance, I could see his figure standing behind the bridegroom, generally erect, though the head bowed a little once or twice. Ah, the wedding might seem dreary in its solemn love and daring, bare of all those sweet little charities which generally drape such scenes in mists of tearful smiles and smiling tears, but many a bridal, with troops of congratulating friends, might envy that one loyal and true wedding guest, poor indeed, lowly as yet—though I think the day may come when

Agnes will be proud to say who stood behind her bridegroom—but who bravely brought all he had, even his own heart, and laid it as a willing offering on the marriage altar.

One or two hearty sobs, startling the rector's eyes from his book, warned us that some interested spectator had stolen upon our solitude ; and when all was over, and we left the vestry, where Agnes had signed the name that she need not change, and Ruth had kissed her, and I had blessed her, and Ewen had touched her hand—very lightly—and said never a word, then we found Sarah Irons seated on a back seat, indulging herself in a “good cry.” And I was glad to see that Ralph Herbert did not shrink from the honest servant's fond embrace. Ah, surely henceforth every woman, however plain and homely, will be sacred to him for the sake of one ! The old Crusaders held their chivalry in the name of “Our Ladye.”

And should not every man be gentler and braver for the sake of the woman in his heart, whether her image stand at a hearth or in a shrine?

“I’ve left a letter for you from the master at your house, sir,” whispered Sarah, detaining me a minute after the young people passed out. “O’ course I don’t know what’s in it, but it can’t part ’em now, thank God!”

No bells, no whispering faces, no huzzas, only the breeze stirring a little in the new-budded boughs, and one or two villagers looking from their doors, with a little wonder and curiosity, to see the squire’s son and niece once more walking together, and that as quietly and soberly as if it were quite a matter of course.

According to instructions, we found a substantial meal spread in our parlour, and Phillis in watchful, conscious attendance. The letter from Mr. Herbert lay beside my

plate, and I did not venture to touch it until dinner was over. I might have spared my fears.

“DEAR SIR” (it ran),—“I have just parted from my niece Agnes, who has been a good and dutiful niece to me, though not as wise as she might have been. Now I do not like that the last daughter of the Herberts of Upper Mallowe should leave her home with no portion, but the beggarly produce of a book of verses and stories. Therefore I enclose ten fifty-pound notes, which I hope will be useful to her. I would have taken care to bind this sum upon herself, but she’s one of those women you can’t take care of, because she’s determined to throw herself away.—I remain, yours truly,
RALPH HERBERT, sen.”

I silently placed the letter and its enclosure before the young couple. They read it through, and looked at each other.

“Ralph,” said Agnes, very softly, “now you may go and say good-bye to uncle.”

“He will not see me,” he answered, sadly; “and, besides, we have no time.”

“He will see you if I ask him now,” she returned; “and we will go on our way to the station.”

Their boxes had all been despatched there in a cart, and so the little journey was to be made on foot. At the gate of the Great Farm, Agnes turned and said, “Mr. Garrett and I will go in together.”

But we found the hall-door open, and so Ralph advanced into the porch, and stood there to await his fate, while my sister and Ewen lingered beyond the garden palings.

The strange stillness of the early morning had passed away, and there was a lively breeze astir. It swept through the open hall and lightly rustled the curtains of Agnes' deserted parlour, and I heard the

low of cattle from the meadows behind the house. But Agnes did not heed the familiar sights and sounds, she walked straight forward to the dining-room; its door, too, was open, and the room was in a flood of fresh spring sunshine. At the far end of the long table, just before the quaint window, with its treasures of blooming hyacinths and crocuses, sat Mr. Herbert. He did not heed our footsteps—perhaps he did not even hear them. His arms were spread over the table, and his head was laid upon them. I don't know whether it was owing to the strong light or to his attitude, but, for the first time, I noticed many white hairs among his glossy brown. Agnes stopped to notice nothing; she went straight up to him, and sat suddenly down on the floor, and laid her cheek on his knee.

“Uncle!” she cried.

He started up, half bewildered, and caught her in his arms. “My darling, my pretty

one!" he exclaimed. "But you're not mine now; I could not keep you."

"Uncle!" she cried again, putting her arms round his neck, the tears raining down her face. "Uncle, my husband wants to thank you for all your kindness to me. Let him come!"

Mr. Herbert half shook off the clasp of those gentle arms, but they were firm with the might of love. If he did not own Ralph as his son, she chose him for her husband! He hesitated, and Agnes kissed him again, and her tears fell on his hands.

"Let him come!" said he.

I went softly, and led him in. I did not re-enter the room. Nay, I closed the door behind Ralph, for there are some scenes which strange eyes ought not to see—some words which only God may hear!

* * * *

Half-an-hour afterwards they came out—all three. They walked together to the

station, and Ewen, and Ruth, and I followed behind. On the platform stood old Mr. M'Callum, and George and Miss Sanders. George had a nosegay for Agnes.

Mr. Herbert was almost inclined to go with them to the sea-port, but he did not. "It's parting either here or there," he said, "so we'll get it over at once. But somebody's going to see them off, I suppose?"

"I am," said Ewen. "I will be with them till the last!"

"You're a good fellow!" responded the farmer.

A shriek from the engine, and Agnes, already seated in the carriage, placed her hand in her husband's. Ewen sat opposite. Another shriek, a smile, nods, and a burst of tears, and they were off. And we heard Griff's growl, as the dog-carriage passed us.

God bless the bride and bridegroom!

And God bless Ewen! He smiled as he looked from the window; and so I know how men smile at the stake or on the rack. And yet he will be all the better for this anguish. A pure love never harmed any man. Love and sorrow have sung the world's sweetest songs, and painted its fairest pictures, and achieved its greatest deeds. So some day, perhaps, Ewen will make a picture of an emigrant ship, and the agony which was in his heart he will paint in the faces there, so that they shall stir the souls of all that gaze thereon into that human tenderness whence grows

“That best portion of a good man's life,
His little nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love.”

Oh, let us thank God for the love and sorrow of genius! Yet, let us thank Him reverently, as we thank Him for all the blessings which come to us, by the sacrifice

and pain of others. We take the flowers that blossom from the thorny stems, but they long for the time when the Master's eye shall see that the fruit is ripe, and His hand shall gather it in. I remember one verse in Agnes' father's book :—

“ Oh, 'tis hard to hear them praise us for the music we have
learned
From the sobs we choked within us, and the hidden tears
that burned ;
When the poet goes to God, sure he leaves his harp
behind,
For the song they sing in heaven is of quite another
kind.”

A POSTSCRIPT BY MISS GARRETT.

Now Edward has finished his love-story, I hope he will listen to me when I want to talk to him about the Refuge or the Hospital. For it seems to me uncommonly like a love-story, though it professes to be a record of what an old man and woman are able to do, when they sit down to rest

and take breath before they go into the King's presence.

We have heard from Agnes and Ralph. They are settled in Canada, and Agnes says they are doing very well, but how is one to believe her? I shall not be surprised if Mr. Herbert goes out after them. For in this world, wonders never cease. The other evening when I was at the Great Farm, in the dining-room, where that portrait's face is now decently turned forward, he almost cried while he pointed out a mark on the rug, worn by Griff's paws, where he used to hold on when Mr. Herbert tried to push him away to make room for his own feet. Now if that is not rank sentiment and just like people, I don't know what is! I should not have pushed the poor dog aside, and then I should have had no mark in the rug to cry over, and so I suppose people would say I had no feeling! But I don't care what they say.

Bessie manages the Hospital famously, and her nephew lives with her. Phillis is matron at the Refuge now, and Mr. M'Callum says she does very well indeed. The old man would not leave his poor people even to go and sit in the chimney corner at Meadow Farm, where Alice and her husband live in great happiness and prosperity. They have a little daughter, and Edward and I are the godfather and godmother. Alice thought she should be christened after me, and so did I, but Edward said she must be a "Lucy," because that was a family name with the Westons. Family name, indeed—I dare say he cares a great deal for family names! But as he says nothing, I don't take any notice. If it pleases him to keep a secret, let him think he keeps it, that's all!

Ewen does not come very often to Upper Mallowe, at least he does not stay very long when he does come. He does not go to the

counting-house now, but is "an artist all out," as his grandfather says. But he says he will return to business the moment his art is a labour to him, because it is not right to turn God's gift into a machine. He is a very fine young man, but I hear that people say he is stern and haughty. Nobody ever believes in a volcano, which keeps itself to itself, and does not rampage and destroy everything around it.

But I can't write any more, for the Refuge bills are just sent in, and there's a basket of linen to sew for the Hospital. It's very well to write about work, but it's better to do it!

THE END.

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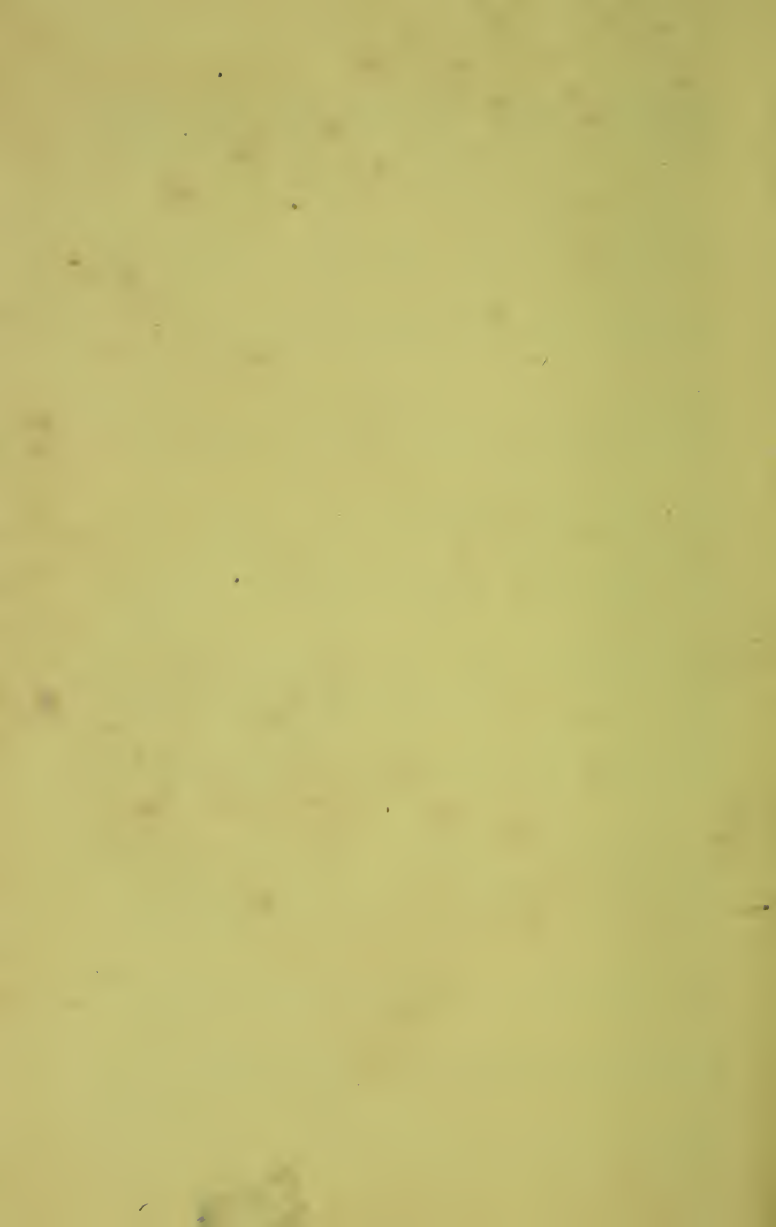
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